

LORAS COLLEGE LIBRARY

STAC

842.83G2EAu42FHo.

c1

The house of Fourchambault;

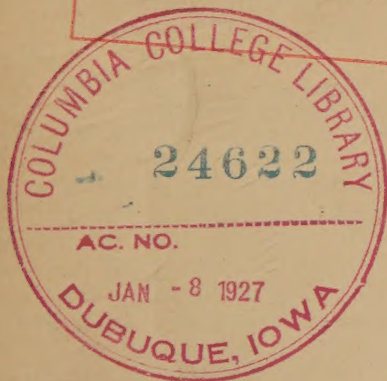


3 0051 00383 7249

PRICE 72 600

The House of Fourchambault : a Comedy in Five Acts : by Emile Augier :
Translated by Barrett H. Clark

WITHDRAWN FROM
LORAS COLLEGE LIBRARY



Samuel French : Publisher
28-30 West Thirty-eighth St. : New York

LONDON

Samuel French, Ltd.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

COPYRIGHT 1915.
BY SAMUEL FRENCH

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT.

EMILE AUGIER

Emile Augier is one of the greatest French dramatists of the nineteenth century. Together with Alexandre Dumas fils, he originated in France what is known as the "thesis" play. For more than thirty years he was a commanding figure, a revolutionary force in French letters and the French theater.

He began his career as a Romantic, and wrote verse plays, but even in one of his earliest—"L'Aventurière"—he gave evidence of his didactic bent, for this was but a thinly disguised thesis play. Augier always stood for the solid bourgeois virtues, solidarity of the family, and temperance. In "Le Mariage d'Olympe" he aims his shaft against the "Reign of the Courtesan" who tries to enter families of rank and social standing; in "Les Effrontés" he denounced a monopoly of power by the press and by political cliques; in "Les Fourchambault" he sings the praise of fidelity, in "Le Gendre de M. Poirier", one of the greatest comedies in French literature, he drew conspicuously successful pictures of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, contrasting them with fairness and kindly good-humor.

"The House of Fourchambault" ("Les Fourchambault") is a family-drama, full of clever characterization (take for instance Mme. Fourchambault and Léopold), well constructed, genial, and interesting.

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FOURCHAMBAULT (60 years)

LÉOPOLD, *his son* (24 years)

BERNARD (38 years)

BARON RASTIBOULOIS, *prefect of Seine-et-Manche* (55 years)

MADAME FOURCHAMBAULT (47 years)

MADAME BERNARD (60 years)

BLANCHE (18 years)

MARIE LETELLIER (22 years)

SCENE: *The first act is laid at Ingouville; the others in Le Havre.*

The House of Fourchambault

ACT I

SCENE: *At the Villa Fourchambault, Ingouville. A drawing-room on the ground-floor, opening upon a terrace from which can be seen Le Havre and the sea. A large entrance at the back, which remains open; doors on either side.*

FOURCHAMBAULT is seated to the right, near a table, reading his paper; on the other side of the table is MADAME FOURCABAULT, crocheting; up-stage to the right, a small table, where BLANCHE is serving coffee; to the left, MARIE, seated, doing fancy-work near a work-table upon which are heaped a number of skeins of colored worsted; LEOPOLD, standing behind her, smokes a cigaret.

THE BUTLER. (*At the large door at the back*)
The coachman wishes to know whether there are any orders?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No: I am not going out to-day.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But I am going out. I'm going to Le Havre.

LEOPOLD. To the office? On Sunday?

FOURCHAMBAULT. There is no Sunday for a banker. You needn't worry: I shall leave you at

8 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

Ingouville. (*To the BUTLER*) The victoria in an hour!

THE BUTLER. Anything further?

LEOPOLD. Wait a moment. (*To MARIE and BLANCHE*) Shall we go horseback riding, ladies?

BLANCHE. I'm tired.

LEOPOLD. How about you, Maïa?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Without your sister? Are you out of your mind?

BLANCHE. There would be nothing very extraordinary in that.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It wouldn't be respectable. That will do, Germain.

(*The BUTLER goes out.*)

MARIE. In France, then, a young lady who goes horseback riding alone with a young man—?—Is that "shocking?"

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very shocking, my dear! Do they do that at Bourbon?

MARIE. Oh, we aren't so careful about small matters, and I assure you the devil gains nothing.

LEOPOLD. (*Aside*) He doesn't lose much, either!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You must accustom yourself to our European prudery.

MARIE. I shall find it very difficult. You know, I was brought up according to the principles of Créole liberty, added to those of the English,—my mother came from the Island of Mauritius.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, my dear child, if you are applying for a position as teacher, your manners must be a little more—correct.

MARIE. I'll have them when they become necessary—after I get the position.

BLANCHE. Why talk about that, Papa? It's not at all pleasant.

MARIE. Oh, my dear Blanchette, if I took everything to heart, I'd live a dog's life. Heaven has

denied me much, but I'm at least happy, and I can look into the future without a shadow of doubt or fear.

LEOPOLD. What troubles me is what you are going to teach your pupils. You don't appear to be a well of knowledge.

MARIE. There's where you are mistaken: I am. You might even come to school to me.

LEOPOLD. Oh, oh—you're a regular Pico de la Girandola, then?

MARIE. Mirandola, my poor fellow! One point for me.

LEOPOLD. I just wanted to catch you.

BLANCHE. Yes, the way you said the other day that Henry IV was the son of Henry III!

LEOPOLD. That was my opinion on the subject.

MARIE. Was it sincere?

LEOPOLD. And disinterested, I swear.

MARIE. Then I respect it.

LEOPOLD. (*Sighing*) Without sharing it!

(LEOPOLD places a letter on the sewing-table, among the worsted skeins; MARIE turns round at the same moment and catches sight of it.)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Who has also seen the letter; aside*) A letter? How imprudent!

MARIE. (*Sitting by the sewing-table and taking up the letter, which she folds twice—to LEOPOLD*) Help me untangle this skein.

LEOPOLD. Certainly. (*He kneels on one knee before her; she takes the skein in her hands, and begins to wind the worsted round the letter.—In an undertone*) My letter! That's not nice of you!

MARIE. Would you prefer my giving it to your mother?

BLANCHE. (*Looking at them*) The Countess and Chérubin, you might almost think!*

* Characters in Beaumarchais', *Le Mariage de Figaro*.

10 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's this, Mademoiselle, have you seen *Le Mariage de Figaro*? (*To his wife*) Do you allow her to read such things?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, I am very careful: she saw the play only as an opera.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is different—if it was at the *Opéra*, she understood nothing.

BLANCHE. (*Aside*) No, I'm so stupid.

MARIE. (*Still winding the worsted*) Any news?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Three of friend Bernard's ships came in yesterday—if that's of any interest to you?

LEOPOLD. Everything that concerns M. Bernard is of especial interest to Mlle. Letellier.

MARIE. Don't move!

FOURCHAMBAULT. There's a man who made a fortune in quick time!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Wasn't he only captain of a trader when the Civil War broke out in the United States?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes. He foresaw how long the war would last; he put everything he had into cotton, and then waited. To-day he's a millionaire, one of the principal ship-owners in Le Havre.

LEOPOLD. And his money has left him quite unchanged—unluckily for him! He is certainly an ungainly, thick-set, ill-looking fellow!

BLANCHE. Oh, I know he's your pet aversion, so——

MARIE. What did he ever do to you?

LEOPOLD. Nothing—he's a fearful-looking beast, that's all!

MARIE. I don't think so; at times I think he's beautiful.

LEOPOLD. Oh! When?

MARIE. Well—in time of danger, for instance.

LEOPOLD. What do you know about that?

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 11

MARIE. On ship-board when we were crossing, I once saw him stop an attempted mutiny; and I tell you that little "thick-set" fellow rose to six feet when he took the leader of the mutineers by the throat and ordered his accomplices to put him in irons.

LEOPOLD. And did they obey?

MARIE. Men don't disobey a man whose eyes flashed lightning the way his did. I should have been proud at that moment to be his daughter or his sister.

LEOPOLD. Why not his mother, while you're wishing?

MARIE. (*Smiling*) The place is taken, and very well, let me tell you.

BLANCHE. What does she look like?

MARIE. She's tall and pale, and has white hair.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Why doesn't he introduce her anywhere?

LEOPOLD. Doubtless because she is not a presentable person. Maïa's friend is a barnyard peacock, who left Dieppe, where he was born, because there were too many people who knew of his low birth. He hides his mother here as well as he can, because she is also another indication of his humble origin.

MARIE. Madame Bernard is a very distinguished and worthy woman, Léo.—Now, the ball is all rolled. (*She rises and puts the ball in the work-basket*)

LEOPOLD. (*Also rising; aside*) You have only to unroll it, now.

(*The clock strikes one.*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Rising*) One o'clock, already! I expect a visit, and my hair isn't dressed yet. Come, Blanche, I have something to say to you.

12 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's this visit?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is my affair. (*Aside to BLANCHE*) Someone for you. Walk ahead, I'll tell you about it. (*BLANCHE goes out; MME. FOURCHAMBAULT goes behind the sewing-table, and turns over the skeins*) The letter's not here, and I was sure—! (*She goes out*)

LEOPOLD. (*To MARIE, at the large entrance*) Shall we walk in the park?

MARIE. I'm the only one left, then, whom no one "has to talk with;" I'll go and pick a bouquet for my birthday.

LEOPOLD. Is to-day your birthday?

MARIE. Yes—every year I give myself a bouquet. (*She goes out*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. Sit down there.

LEOPOLD. (*Sitting near the sewing-table*) You want me to sit down? Are you going to lecture me?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes. I'm not satisfied with you, my boy.

LEOPOLD. Father, I swear it's not I!

FOURCHAMBAULT. What?

LEOPOLD. I don't know; but since my conscience is clear, I protest in advance.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Try to be serious for once in your life. Your behavior pains and grieves me, my dear Leopold. You don't gamble any longer, you rarely go to the Club, you gave up the little dancing-girl—don't deny it! I have my information on good authority: from the fathers of your friends—they get it from their sons.

LEOPOLD. For Heaven's sake, Father! Mother and you have given me so many sermons on gambling and dancing-girls that I thought you'd be glad to see me reform. If I'm mistaken, there's no harm done so far, and I——

FOURCHAMBAULT. Your friends do not attrib-

ute your reforms to our sermons, but to the arrival at our home of Mlle. Letellier. As a matter of fact, I have noticed that during the past two months you have been quite unnaturally assiduous within the family circle.

LEOPOLD. If you mean to insinuate that the presence of Maïa serves as an added attraction to the house——

FOURCHAMBAULT. To begin with, you might call her Mlle. Marie!

LEOPOLD. What sort of quarrel are you trying to lead me into? I call her Maïa just as she calls me Leo. What's the harm in calling her by her Créole name? Do you object, too, to my speaking to her in her own native broken French?

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, I don't! But in that way you tell her in that gibberish a heap of things you wouldn't dare say in French.

LEOPOLD. She's no worse than I am in that respect.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You are worse than she; I know your cynicism on the subject of women. This one comes from a foreign country, she's poor, and a bit free in her manners; she appears to you as a *déclassée*—you hope to—obtain favors from her. I tell you I'd be heart-broken if anything happened to her; she's our guest, I am responsible for her; I have great affection for her, and I respect her highly. I beg you not to make love to her.

LEOPOLD. What makes you think I am?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Good Heavens, can't I see? I've been seeing it ever since I was told. Your motives cannot be good. Now you must be made aware of her situation; I have therefore looked into the matter and found your uncle's letter. There, read it. (*He gives LEOPOLD a letter*)

LEOPOLD. (*Reading*) "Ile Bourbon, April 15, 1877. My Dear Brother-in-law. This letter will

14 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

be presented by Mademoiselle Marie Letellier, in whom the entire colony has the most respectful interest."

FOURCHAMBAULT. "Most respectful," you see.

LEOPOLD. There are eight pages to this letter.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Continue, and stop your talking.

LEOPOLD. I don't talk so much as my uncle. (*Reading*) "The most respectful interest."—You are perfectly well aware you told us everything in the letter.

FOURCHAMBAULT. It appears that you have forgotten it.

LEOPOLD. I? What will you wager that I can't recite the whole thing in twenty words, signature included? Marie Letellier, twenty-two years, born at Bourbon, French father, English mother. Ruin, and death of both parents. Orphan taken under the protection of an old friend of the family. At end of the year, death of old friend who leaves to orphan a little farm in Calvados. Heir leaves for France in order to sell farm——

FOURCHAMBAULT. And I believe I have found a purchaser who will pay 40,000 francs for it.

LEOPOLD. Don't interrupt the report! Those four words don't count. With intention of selling little farm and obtaining position as teacher—as in comedies.—While waiting, lodged in the domicile of Fourchambault the Elder who, believing her very virtuous, fears that Fourchambault Junior might easily lead her astray——

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, God bless me, she can be quite virtuous and yet fall in love with you! And you, I presume, leading her on with promises of marriage——

LEOPOLD. An outrageous supposition on the part of Fourchambault Senior: Léopold's not villainous!

FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not always out of villainy that such promises are made! You begin by flirting with a pretty girl just to pass the time; soon, a mere caprice turns into love, love into passion, and you end by proposing marriage, and all in perfectly good faith!

LEOPOLD. What a lot you know about it! Have you gone through the same experience yourself?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I? Never! But I once had a friend who began with his sister's piano-teacher—like you and Maïa—and one fine day she found she was—er——

LEOPOLD. Your friend had no scruples, did he? And he married her?

FOURCHAMBAULT. He wanted to, and if the woman had been as irreproachable as Maïa, there would have been no obstacle to prevent his doing so. Luckily his father opened his eyes for him at the time—but what a fearful scandal there was! The poor boy couldn't marry for the next ten years! Let that be a lesson for you.

LEOPOLD. Well, if that could influence me to marry, as it did your friend, the only daughter of a rich manufacturer of lamp-shades——

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's that? Lamp-shades?

LEOPOLD. Grandfather Reboulin's lamp-shades, eh?

FOURCHAMBAULT. But who told you——?

LEOPOLD. That your friend married mother? It is not hard to see you don't go often to the theater! General rule: when one character makes an object-lesson for another with the story of a friend "who shall be nameless," you may be sure it is no other than his own.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Absurd! If you study life from comedies, I don't wonder at your despising women. What my friend's name was, is of no importance—if you want to know, it was Durand.

16 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

LEOPOLD. In his leisure moments.—How old was he?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Twenty-two.

A SERVANT. (*At the door*) The victoria is ready.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well, I'm coming. (*To LEOPOLD*) I shall return in two hours. (*He goes out*)

LEOPOLD. (*Alone*) After that story about the music teacher, to believe in the virtue of female companions who intend to teach; oh, no, it's really too thin! Especially when they've been aboard ship with quellers of rebellions. Dear Papa is no more to be feared than the new-born babe! I can imagine his respecting women who asked nothing better than to be offended!—Never fear, charming Maïa, I'll have nothing to do with his aged inexperience, and if I please you half as much as you please me, we'll not have to trouble the mayor* or his assistants!

MARIE. (*Enters, laughing. She carries a basket of flowers. To BLANCHE, who enters at the same time*) What a lovely suitor for you!

BLANCHE. And he has red hair—but it's begun to fall out.

LEOPOLD. (*Going toward them*) Who the devil are you talking about?

BLANCHE. Were you there?

MARIE. We were speaking of the young Baron Anatole Rastiboulois.

LEOPOLD. What were you saying?

BLANCHE. Mamma expects a visit from his father, M. le préfet de Seine-et-Manche.

LEOPOLD. And what can that potentate want with her?

BLANCHE. Ah, now, ask Maïa, I'm too excited.

LEOPOLD. (*To MARIE*) Tell me, Maïa.

* Who officiates at marriage ceremonies in France.

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 17

MARIE. He is coming to ask for the hand of Blanche, for his son.

LEOPOLD. He will be cordially welcomed!

BLANCHE. Of course! Mamma will be delighted!

LEOPOLD. But from what I have just heard, you——

BLANCHE. I, too. I consider Monsieur Anatole quite adequate for a husband.

MARIE. What, would marry him?

BLANCHE. Why not?

LEOPOLD. She puzzles me, that girl.

BLANCHE. Isn't one husband much like another? Like the wines in a restaurant, the only difference is in the label.

LEOPOLD. I had an idea you yourself had decided on some one——

BLANCHE. Nonsense!

LEOPOLD. I rather thought that Victor Chauvet——

BLANCHE. Are you interested in him?

LEOPOLD. Not the least bit.

BLANCHE. Neither am I. He is in Calcutta—he may remain there, so far as I am concerned.

LEOPOLD. Well, if he had no more claim on your affection than that——

BLANCHE. That's nonsense—out of a boarding-school girl's novel——

LEOPOLD. It's *good* sense, little sister.

MARIE. Too good.

LEOPOLD. Think so?

THE SERVANT. (*Announcing*) M. Bernard.

LEOPOLD. My pet aversion—I'm off! (*He goes out, left*)

BERNARD. (*Entering at the back*) How are you, ladies?

MARIE. How d'ye do?

BLANCHE. How are you, M. Bernard?

18 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

(MARIE arranges her flowers in a vase, on the table to the right.)

BERNARD. Is Mme. Fourchambault to be seen? I have come to report on an errand she asked me to do for her.

BLANCHE. Oh, yes, the yacht. Have you been over it?

BERNARD. The ship's in good condition. It cost originally 40,000 francs. Sir John Sunter is willing to sell it for 20,000—it's a good bargain; I have only to obtain Mme. Fourchambault's authorization to close the bargain.

BLANCHE. What great fun it will be to promenade on it! Mamma is dressing: I doubt whether she can see you at once, but I'll tell her you are here. (*She goes out, left*)

MARIE. (*Seated near the table to the right, taking BERNARD's hands in her own*) How are you, dear friend? Why did I call you "dear friend?" I have known you for only three months; but you were so good to me while we were crossing, so like a father—no, not so old as that!—like a brother——

BERNARD. Not so old!

MARIE. Neither father nor brother? What, then?

BERNARD. You have already said it: friend, old friend.

MARIE. That is not enough. Do you want me to call you uncle?

BERNARD. I should be very glad to have you.

MARIE. Good. Well, Uncle, sit down there. (*He sits at the opposite side of the table*) How is your mother? I haven't seen her for two weeks.

BERNARD. She complains of the fact.

MARIE. It's not my fault. Since we've moved to Ingouville, I've not set foot in Le Havre.

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 19

BERNARD. You are enjoying yourself with the Fourchambaults.

MARIE. Very much: they are very kind, they are spoiling me as fast as they know how. I'm in love with the daughter.

BERNARD. There is also a young man.

MARIE. Léopold? Very nice sort of fellow—charming.

BERNARD. Charming! He makes love to you, doesn't he?

MARIE. If he didn't, he wouldn't be doing his duty as host. Does it ever happen in France that a young girl is not made love to? (*She rises and goes to the work-basket, getting a ball of worsted from which she takes a strand to tie her bouquet*)

BERNARD. Married women are preferred.

MARIE. It's more moral. What a funny country! Well, I'm only the more obliged to Léopold for wasting his time on me.

BERNARD. Take care! It is said that his time is not wasted.

MARIE. (*Turning round quickly*) Who says that?

BERNARD. That's the story that's going about town.

MARIE. (*Crossing*) Let the town mind its own affairs!

BERNARD. It's always meddling in what doesn't concern it.

MARIE. You can tell the gossips to mind their own business, as I mind my own. It's my pleasure to have Léopold make love to me, and I cannot permit anyone to see anything wrong in his doing so.

BERNARD. Little heed they'll take of what you permit.

MARIE. Then what will be the harm?

BERNARD. I ought to warn you that he will not marry you.

MARIE. Come, come, Uncle, you have a high opinion of me! Do you think I'm looking for a husband?

BERNARD. If you are not looking for a husband, for Heaven's sake, what are you looking for?

MARIE. I want to—(*Laughing*) merely to enjoy a little warfare between the two of us. Leave me to my own devices, and don't be a kill-joy.

BERNARD. Take my advice, my child, don't play with fire: you always get scorched.

MARIE. Haven't you confidence in me?

BERNARD. I have confidence in your virtue, but I doubt your prudence; it seems to me you are rather too free in your ways here.

MARIE. What more natural? It's my last breath of freedom. Just think, I leave here only to go into a sort of slavery.

BERNARD. What you call slavery, my child, is the most serious and dignified of life's vocations.

MARIE. You are right.

BERNARD. You are in a false position here.

MARIE. Find me another place.

BERNARD. Will you let me?

MARIE. (*Giving him her hand*) Please!

(*Enter* BLANCHE.)

BLANCHE. Mamma asks you to excuse her; she is not ready to see you yet. She must consult with Papa before closing the bargain.

BERNARD. Hasn't he been consulted yet?

BLANCHE. He will be in an hour's time; Mamma will write you.

BERNARD. I shall wait, there is no harm in that. Good-bye, ladies! (*To* MARIE) You will hear from me in a few days. (*He goes out*)

BLANCHE. What does he mean by "hearing from him?"

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 21

MARIE. He was good enough to offer to find me a position.

BLANCHE. Do you want to leave us?

MARIE. I don't want to, my dear Blanchette, but I can't stay here until the end of time; I have already imposed on your kindness.

BLANCHE. We are the ones who are imposing on you, and most selfishly. If we weren't so proud, we should acknowledge that we were in *your* debt.

MARIE. How do you make that out?

BLANCHE. You are so thrillingly alive! You breathe vitality into everyone you associate with. You have taught me more in two months than my teachers have in ten years: I have learned to take an interest in things. I was merely a doll before I knew you; I feel that in your presence I am becoming a young woman, too—I love you like a sister.*

MARIE. (*Kissing her*) I love you like a sister, too.

BLANCHE. How sweet that word is—in French as well as in English! I have always wanted to have a sister—like you! What a beautiful sister I should have, and what a daughter you would be for Mamma!

MARIE. I have an idea that this beauty would hardly be to her taste!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Speaking to someone off-stage*) It's an outrage!

BLANCHE. I hear her.

MARIE. A storm!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Outside*) But, my dear——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well, let's not say another word——!

BLANCHE. Let's run for our lives!

MARIE. Let's get out of their way! (*They go out, back*)

* The last six words are English in the text.

22 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Entering left*) Why are you following me?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm not, I am merely accompanying you.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I can't bear to have you near me; leave me!—When my poor mother gave me to you together with 800,000 francs, she never dreamed she was condemning me to a life of privation!

FOURCHAMBAULT. A life of privation? Because I refuse you a yacht?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought that my dowry might allow me a few simple luxuries—I see I'm mistaken.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Simple luxury? Twenty thousand francs!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Do *you* have to pay for it?

FOURCHAMBAULT. That sort of reasoning would bankrupt me!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Now I'm ruining the dear man! His whole fortune comes from me.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Don't excite yourself, my dear; I speak quietly, but you must understand the situation.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What situation?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I ought to be rich—but thanks to the way you manage things, and run up expenses, "out of your dowry," as you say, I manage to live only from day to day. If a financial crisis occurred to-morrow in Le Havre, I shouldn't have one sou to rub against another.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's not true! If it is, your fate is sealed.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Mine, or yours?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Mine, the idea! Is it my fault if you don't understand business? If you

never knew how to profit by our position and acquaintances? Anyone else, in your place——

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very possibly, but I have been foolish enough to wish to remain an honest man.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, every fool who hasn't been able to make a success has said the same thing. And I tell you, Monsieur, when a man is afraid to make a career for himself, he ought never to be the head of a bank. He ought to resign in favor of his son.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You keep harping on that! Haven't I already told you that you might just as well bury me alive! I am already a nonentity in my family.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. This is a fine time to pose as a victim, just after refusing me a little favor.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I refuse nothing; I am merely laying the matter before you. Now do what you like, I can say no more.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Good! But, really, you've been very hard on me, Adrien, and at the very moment I was going to surprise you——

FOURCHAMBAULT. Surprise? Well, what is it?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The House of Fourchambault has just gained a signal victory over the House of Duhamel.

FOURCHAMBAULT. To wit——?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Madame Duhamel has for many years been trying to marry her daughter to the Prefect's son——

FOURCHAMBAULT. I know that. Well?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. While the good lady was publishing her intentions abroad I was quietly working away, and now Baron Rastiboulois is coming here to ask you for your daughter's hand.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, no! I have someone else in view.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You have? I should be most happy to know——?

FOURCHAMBAULT. A splendid lad—one of our sort—who loves Blanche, and is loved by her—or I am very much mistaken.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, you are very much mistaken—absolutely. Do you refer to M. Victor Chauvet? M. Bernard's clerk?

FOURCHAMBAULT. His right hand, his *alter ego*.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Blanche merely thought she had a fancy for him—it was a morning mist, which I had only to blow upon to drive away. She thinks nothing more of the matter, and I advise you to do likewise.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What have you against the young man?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Nothing whatsoever! Only his name is so ridiculous—Chauvet*!

FOURCHAMBAULT. He's as curly-haired as a sheep!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. As you like, only I should never have consented to be called Madame Chauvet, and my daughter takes after her mother. But that's a detail; the long and short of the matter is that I refuse to allow my daughter to marry a clerk.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You refuse! You refuse! There are two of us to take into account.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Are you giving Blanche a dowry?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I?—No.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Then you see very clearly that there are not two of us to take into account. As I am giving her her dowry, I have the right to choose my son-in-law.

* An untranslatable pun on the word "chauve": bald.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And I have the right to refuse; I tell you I won't have your little Baron at any price.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What have *you* against him, besides his title?

FOURCHAMBAULT. He's a man-about-town, a gambler, a roue, old for his years.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. He pleases Blanche just as he is.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Lord! He's no beauty.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What does that matter? Haven't I been the happiest of wives?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's that?—For the last time, I refuse. Blanche may not marry Chauvet—that's possible!—but she shall not marry Rastiboulois, that's certain!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. But, Monsieur——

FOURCHAMBAULT. I have spoken! (*He goes out*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Alone*) Our lords and masters! These are the creatures who make the laws! We unfortunate women! We wear out our lives trying to better our families, and then a hare-brained despot spoils everything for a whim!

A SERVANT. (*Announcing*) M. le baron Rastiboulois.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) What can I say to him?

RASTIBOULOIS. (*As he enters*) Pardon me, dear lady, for taking the liberty of coming without preparing you. I have so little spare time——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Motioning him to a chair*) You need make no apologies, Baron.

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Sitting*) No "Baron" here, please: merely a father, and it is as such that I have presumed to ask for this interview, of which my age would otherwise render me unworthy, I regret——

26 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) How friendly he is!

RASTIBOULOIS. You are acquainted with the object of my visit, as my wife and you are agreed on all details. It is therefore a pure formality that I am fulfilling——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. First of all, M. le baron, I ought to let you know that I have not yet taken my husband into my confidence.

RASTIBOULOIS. Good Lord! Could I have possibly been too precipitous in breaking off with the Duhamels?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) Oh!

RASTIBOULOIS. Of course, you understand——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) Understand! (*Resolutely*) I really must have my husband's consent.

RASTIBOULOIS. Good.—Well, Madame, prepare your lord and master for the proposal which I shall have the honor to make him to-morrow; and, in order to settle the affair between you and me, though I dislike discussing money-matters with a pretty woman——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, Baron!

RASTIBOULOIS. With a pretty woman—I repeat it. Although people of our station in life are above these sordid details, I must as a matter of course, ask you a few questions.—I am giving my son 150,000 francs on his wedding-day, and he will inherit an equal amount from his mother and me.—There!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And I, for my part——

RASTIBOULOIS. Not another word, if you please! If your daughter brought nothing but herself, we would sign the contract with our eyes closed.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You are a true gentleman.

RASTIBOULOIS. So it is said.—One word: this

300,000 francs' dowry is from your private fortune?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. My husband does not want to put his tools, his working capital, into property.

RASTIBOULOIS. His tools? His weapons, his armament, for a large commercial enterprise, like your husband's, is a form of nobility in itself, and the House of Fourchambault may well form an alliance on a basis of perfect equality with the House of Rastiboulois. Its money is as good as ours, and a fortune the size of your husband's, which amounts to—how much?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I haven't the slightest notion.

RASTIBOULOIS. Believe me, I have no curiosity in the matter. It was merely—er—to round out the sentence that led me to seem to ask the question. I have a mortal terror of what are basely called—expectations. I have only one, Madame: merely that *you* outlive *us*.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That rests with Heaven! Yet, my health is anything but good, in spite of appearances which are——

RASTIBOULOIS. Admirable, Madame, admirable.—Will your son inherit the bank?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. His sister of course will not be forgotten——

RASTIBOULOIS. Not another word!—I am rather maladroit with my questions; they sound as if I were making an inventory, and God knows I—! I mean, your son is a fine fellow whom any girl would be lucky to catch. Have you any intention of seeing him settled in life?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Not yet, the dear boy!

RASTIBOULOIS. He has still a few wild oats to sow.

28 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT He's "finding himself."

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Smiling*) Yes, so they say—very much.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT (*Aside*) Can they suspect——?

RASTIBOULOIS. I have the greatest admiration for him! I speak, you see, as a member of the family, though I have not yet heard from its head.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You will this evening; he himself will come to you, with his consent. Don't trouble yourself, your time is precious.

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Looking at his watch*) So precious that I must put an end to his charming conversation. Present my compliments to M. Fourchambault, and accept for yourself my kindest regards. (*He kisses her hand*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. 'Till this evening, my dear Baron. (*He goes out*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Alone*) What charming manners!—He might be dangerous if he were ten years younger——

(*Enter FOURCHAMBAULT.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. How did things go?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very nicely. I told him that for my part I was most honored by his offer, but that I must refer the matter to the head of the family, and that you would give him your answer in person. You have only to go to the Prefecture to-night?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What? Must I go to-night? You should have told him flatly and at once! It's very embarrassing to say a thing like that to his face.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is why I didn't tell him.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm going to make a mortal enemy of that man.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Mortal—we are all mortal.

FOURCHAMBAULT. This is a nice time for joking!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. After all, no one is forcing you.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But can't you see that in my position, so much depends on my relations with people! My God, couldn't you have managed the refusal yourself.*

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. So that the Baron will go at once to the Duhamels and give to the rival house the honor of an alliance with his own.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is not pleasant.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Accommodate yourself to circumstances. You still have time to change your mind.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is not the question.—A little fool of a gambler!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Like Leopold!

FOURCHAMBAULT. You don't think I'd give my daughter to Leopold!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well; accept or refuse—it's your affair.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You've put me in a lovely situation!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You have until to-night to decide; I leave you absolutely free to choose.—Only you would be doing me a great favor, as you're going to the Prefecture, to see M. Bernard.

* Original: "*Fourchambault*. Ne pouvais-tu pas prendre la rupture sous ton bonnet?

Madame Fourchambault. Les bonnets ne sont pas encore de mon age. Je me coiffe en cheveux."

The pun is untranslatable.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What for?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To tell him not to trouble about the yacht.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What? You don't want——?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, I've thought it over.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, you can be charming when you want to be!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I am merely reasonable.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I see that, I see that!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I am more reasonable than you, because I give up something absurd, while you were foolish enough to offer to let me have it.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's true! More reasonable than I!—Advise me now about this cursed affair.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I advise you to consult Blanche.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Why, I never thought of that! Perfect! She's the one who's principally interested, after all: I'll see what she has to say. Will you accept her decision?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course, since I accepted yours.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You're an angel.—Let's find Blanche. (MME. FOURCHAMBAULT *offers him her arm; both go toward the left*) After all, if you really would like the yacht——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No. Give it to Blanche for a wedding present.

(FOURCHAMBAULT *laughs.*)

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE: *A room in BERNARD'S home, simply and severely furnished. Entrances at the back and left. At the right, a fireplace; before it, a square table, at one side of which is an arm-chair and at the other an ordinary chair.—Down-stage to the left, a sofa, and a chair beside it. MME. BERNARD is alone, looking at a large book which lies on the table. Enter BERNARD a moment later.*

BERNARD. (*Goes to the chair where his mother is seated and leans over the book*) What a splendid book-keeper you are, Mother dear! Always at your accounts! (*She raises her head and kisses him on the forehead*)

MME. BERNARD. (*Smiling*) You would be very much surprised, wouldn't you, if you were to find some morning that I had left for Belgium?

BERNARD. Dumbfounded! You are not only the soul of order and economy in this house, but the spirit of prudence, of enterprise—you are its inspiration! You're not content with having made my fortune—and you have! Without you, I should never have had the instinct, the strength to act on my convictions, to have confidence in the duration of the Civil War.

MME. BERNARD. Of course! But as to not being content——

BERNARD. With administering this fortune the way Colbert would——

MME. BERNARD. What have I done, for that matter? Stop your nonsense, now! I see you have news——

BERNARD. Big news! Cartier suspended pay-

ment this morning, and the Cartier brothers have absconded.

MME. BERNARD. I always said they'd come to no good end. They were daredevils!

BERNARD. They've gone off with the cash-box.

MME. BERNARD. I'm not surprised. Daredevils, swindlers!

BERNARD. There's a general panic in town. Everyone had such confidence in them; I am about the only one who isn't touched by the catastrophe,—thanks to whom? To you, my Providence! You may well be proud of your far-sightedness.

MME. BERNARD. I made a man of myself the day I became your father. The inferiority of women is only the result of their being guarded. We develop only those powers we have need of. I needed all my powers, in order to do my duty; to keep you alive, educate you. My redemption in the eyes of God was to make an honest man of you, and in my own eyes to make you one of the happiest men in that world which cast me off. All the subtle will-power of the inner-being that other women possess, I applied to the struggle for existence. I have succeeded beyond all my hopes.

BERNARD. Dearest mother! You have been father and mother to me. What's this talk about redemption? The calm surface of your life was stirred just once, only to lapse again into perfect quiet; my childhood was the proof, and what a proof childhood is! Come, I'm not envious of other sons who have to divide their affections among many; I shouldn't know how to do that. You see, I don't even wish to know the name of the man who refused to share me with you.

MME. BERNARD. I shall tell you his name when you have forgiven him as I have.

BERNARD. As you have—! Dear Lord!

MME. BERNARD. On that day, when you come to me frankly and ask me his name, I shall tell you.

BERNARD. (*Seriously*) That day has not yet come. (*With a changed tone*) When I came in, I'll wager you were at your continual occupation—your monomania—making out an inventory?

MME. BERNARD. Exactly. Do you know what your fortune amounts to to-day? Two millions—less three francs.

BERNARD. (*Searching in his pocket*) Here are the three francs—let's have a round sum.

MME. BERNARD. To whom will all this money eventually go?

BERNARD. (*Seated by the fireplace*) Oh, I'll leave enough to start a foundlings' hospital.

MME. BERNARD. Wouldn't it be better to have children of your own?

BERNARD. (*Gaily, as he takes a seat facing his mother*) Marry? Are you still thinking about that?

MME. BERNARD. It would be a great consolation to have legitimate grandchildren!

BERNARD. Really, Mother, why go to all this trouble to conceal the fact that I was not born in wedlock? What was the use in leaving your country and changing your name? Why do you live secluded and alone—if after all, some day, you will be forced to give evidence, at the mayor's and before witnesses, of my irregular birth? I thought we were agreed on that point.

MME. BERNARD. We are, my son, but an idea has just occurred to me that will settle everything: under your real name, we might rent a country house far away from here where I could live for six months, and where you could visit me from time to time. Six months is sufficient time to establish a domicile—I've enquired. You will get married

34 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

there, and when you return to Le Havre with your wife, no one will ask to see your marriage license.

BERNARD. (*Rising*) And do you think we can find a family willing to enter into a scheme like that?

MME. BERNARD. You can marry an orphan.

BERNARD. We should have to take *her* into our confidence.

MME. BERNARD. You may be sure she would keep the secret.

BERNARD. (*Near his mother*) But I want to keep her more than anyone else from knowing.—Let's change the subject.

MME. BERNARD. Ah, my son, how you blush for the shame I have brought upon you!

BERNARD. I? Little I care! (*He kisses his mother*) All the more glory in store for me! If I were the only one concerned, I should cry it from the house-tops, that I owe everything in the world to your courage and my own. But my father's crime—which your mother-love has succeeded in hiding—I want to bury forever; that is purely a matter of filial respect. But you, I don't simply adore you—you're a religion to me!—And I tell you, if my wife didn't share my feelings—though I'm rather sensitive and timid—I think I should strangle her. Now do you understand why I have no desire to marry? (*He sits on the sofa*)

MME. BERNARD. (*Standing near him*) I understand, and I thank you. But don't you think there is some woman somewhere in the world who is broad-minded enough to overlook what I did and forgive me?

BERNARD. Yes: a woman who has suffered enough to understand.

MME. BERNARD. Marie Letellier, for instance?

BERNARD. Marie? Her only misfortunes have

been financial; she would not understand any better than anyone else.

MME. BERNARD. Who knows? Will you let me try to find out?

BERNARD. (*Rising*) Never! What would be the good? Would she take me? Just look at me! I never was handsome, and my adventurous life has not exactly improved my appearance. I'm fifteen years older than she, and I look more.

MME. BERNARD. What difference can that make? She knows all your good qualities; she's seen you at work. I am positive she would be proud to be your wife.

BERNARD. (*With a forced laugh*) My niece, rather! She calls me Uncle—there's the whole story. Don't deceive yourself, Mother dear; if Marie is thinking of anyone, it is not of me. At the Fourchambaults' there is a young man who is making love to her, and she considers him charming.

MME. BERNARD. What makes you think that?

BERNARD. She herself recognizes her precarious position, and asks me to get her out of the danger zone as soon as possible. For some days past I've been trying to find her a place as a French governess in an English family I know.

MME. BERNARD. Would Marie have to leave the country?

BERNARD. (*With an effort*) Yes. But I should prefer to see her do that than stay where she is now. That little Léopold is a sharp rascal—he wouldn't stop short of anything.

MME. BERNARD. But Marie is to be trusted.

BERNARD. (*Becoming more and more excited*) I shall not insult her by doubting it; but we know to our sorrow how small a thing a promise of marriage is with people of that sort, and how little they regard it as a debt of honor. Oh, race

36 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

of thieves, more damnably accurst than highway robbers—shall I ever have a chance to annihilate one of them?

MME. BERNARD. You frighten me! Your eyes! —You're letting hatred get the better of you! Whom are you thinking of?

BERNARD. Do you ask?

MME. BERNARD. I've never seen you like this—never!

BERNARD. (*Bursting out*) Because I've always restrained myself out of regard for you! But the danger hovering over that poor girl has awakened all the bitterness of my heart against him. I hate him, though I don't even know him!

MME. BERNARD. Bernard! You forget—he is your father!

BERNARD. *He* has forgotten that *I* am his son.

MME. BERNARD. What if he never believed that?

BERNARD. (*Astonished*) Never believed it?

MME. BERNARD. (*Falling upon the sofa*) Those words have come to my lips a hundred times and like a coward I kept them back. That is the saddest part of my unhappy past. You have awakened so much in my conscience, that it cried out in spite of myself.

BERNARD. Your conscience?

MME. BERNARD. Your father was an honest man, a good man—I have no right to make you despise him; and no matter how insufficient this explanation is——

BERNARD. (*Quickly*) I don't want to hear it—it's useless. I don't know the man, and I don't want to know him.

MME. BERNARD. He was not the guilty one.

BERNARD. (*Excitedly*) Who was, then?

MME. BERNARD. I—and his father! I, who gave reason for a terrible suspicion; his father, who took advantage of me when I was away.—I went to

Paris, to hide myself; there I received a letter, a short brutal letter, telling me that everything was broken off. He told me, without further explanation, that his father had opened his eyes for him.

BERNARD. But you went at once to accuse your seducer?

MME. BERNARD. (*Averting her eyes*) No.

BERNARD. No?

MME. BERNARD. Forgive me! I thought only of my pride—I wasn't a mother yet! And when you came into the world, I understood that I ought to have defended myself, for your sake—but it was too late; I had proclaimed myself guilty by remaining silent.

BERNARD. You were wise not to say anything. It was not your place to explain, it was *his* duty. But don't call him a good man; a good man would never condemn a victim unheard—he never accepts a slander without certain proof.

MME. BERNARD. (*Turning aside her head*) Is it not the first punishment of a fallen woman to be suspected by the very man who caused her ruin? Every appearance is against her——

BERNARD. Appearances were of no importance; aren't you proof to the contrary, Mother? You have only to look! You've told me everything haven't you? Now, not another word! (*Gesture from MME. BERNARD*) Please! It's as hard for me as for you! (*He goes to the door at the back*)

MME. BERNARD. Are you going?

BERNARD. I'm looking out for the ship Chauvet is on. I'm going to the pier. (*He goes out*)

MME. BERNARD. (*Alone*) Does he blame me for defending his father? Oh, he'll never forgive him! I shan't mention him again!

(*Enter an OLD SERVANT.*)

38 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

SERVANT. (*In formal attire*) There are two ladies very anxious to see you. They're collecting for something.

MME. BERNARD. Ask them to come in.

(*Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and BLANCHE. Each carries a purse used for cash contributions which they are soliciting. MME. BERNARD motions them to sit down on the sofa; the guests sit down. MME. BERNARD then sits on a chair to one side.*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Pardon our boldness, Madame. During the past month, it has been my privilege to be patroness of St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum, and one of my duties is to open a door which I know is always closed except to charity.

MME. BERNARD. I have already made a donation to the asylum which you are helping to support, but it shall never be said that you came from here empty-handed.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I expected no less, Madame, of your generosity. I have heard so much about you! Both of us love a very interesting young lady, Mlle. Letellier, who is now enjoying my hospitality.

MME. BERNARD. (*Rising abruptly; in a choked voice*) Are you Mme. Fourchambault?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Also rising*) Mme. Fourchambault, Madame! Allow me to introduce my daughter.

MME. BERNARD. Mlle. Blanche.

BLANCHE. Who has very much wanted to meet you, Madame, after all the good things Maia has said of you. (*The ladies sit down again.*)

MME. BERNARD. (*Concealing her agitation*) I wish she praised me less and came to see me oftener.

She is neglecting me a little since you settled in Ingouville.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You will probably see her to-day; we are passing the day at Le Havre, where we spent the night. We had a gala dinner last night at the Prefecture, and we are going to the theater to-night—in the Prefect's box. Oh, let me announce to you the engagement of my daughter to the young Baron Rastiboulois.

MME. BERNARD. My hearty congratulations, Mademoiselle!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The banns are published: in a week this little girl will be a baroness. We sign the contract next Wednesday; I hope you will come to our little soirée—it will be quite a modest affair.

MME. BERNARD. I, Madame?

BLANCHE. Please, for your's son's sake, and Maïa's!

MME. BERNARD. It would be a great pleasure, ladies, but—my dress, you see?

BLANCHE. That's so: you're in mourning!

MME. BERNARD. I have worn it for many years—I shall never wear anything else.

BLANCHE. Is that why you don't go about, then?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Blanche!

MME. BERNARD. Yes, Mademoiselle.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I beg your pardon for causing you an unhappy thought. We regret very deeply that you cannot come, Madame.—Come, Blanche! (*She rises*)

BLANCHE. (*Picking up her pocketbook*) Remember the poor, please!

MME. BERNARD. We were forgetting. (*She opens, then closes her purse*) I haven't the right amount with me. Excuse me a moment; I'll be back shortly. (*She goes out, left*)

BLANCHE. Maïa is right; she's very nice!

40 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Not at all bad; she's gone to get her five-franc piece!

BLANCHE. How do you know?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. When she opened her purse I saw gold.

BLANCHE. Well, she's already given something.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's true; but if she has any sort of breeding she must know that people don't give collectors like me five-franc pieces. Why, everything looks so poor here! Look at the room! How cold!

BLANCHE. It is a trifle severe; there can't be much merry-making in this place. It seems quite in harmony with Madame Bernard's looks.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, her looks! Can't you see, her everlasting mourning is only a form of economy! Imagine wearing mourning forever!

(Enter the SERVANT.)

SERVANT. *(Announcing)* Mlle. Letellier!

(Enter MARIE.)

MARIE. You here?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You made us so curious to see Mme. Bernard—!

BLANCHE. We're here on a pretext of collecting for charity.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. She has gone to get a five-franc piece for us: she had nothing but gold in her purse.

MARIE. That's not like her.

(Enter MME. BERNARD, left.)

MME. BERNARD. *(Shaking hands with MARIE)* How are you, Marie? *(To BLANCHE)* Here is my

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 41

contribution, Mademoiselle. (*To MARIE*) It seems as if I hadn't seen you for a century!

BLANCHE. A thousand-franc note, Mamma!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, it's too much, Madame!

MME. BERNARD. We can never give too much to the orphans.

BLANCHE. How they will bless you!

MME. BERNARD. (*Taking her hand*) May God bless you instead, my child! (*Smiling*) Let it be my wedding present!

BLANCHE. My nicest!

MARIE. (*Aside*) How lovely!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Drily*) If everyone is as generous as you, Madame, we shall reap a wonderful harvest.—Come, Blanche!

BLANCHE. See you later, Maïa. Thank you, Madame: you will bring us good luck!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To MME. BERNARD*) Don't trouble to show us out, please: you have a visitor. (*Aside, as she stands on the threshold*) What ostentation!

(BLANCHE and MME. FOURCHAMBAULT go out.)

MME. BERNARD. Why does she seem so nettled?

MARIE. She headed the subscription list herself with fifty piasters—she is now outdistanced by two hundred—it's a hard dose for her to swallow.

MME. BERNARD. (*Smiling*) Really! Tell her my gift is to be anonymous!

MARIE. That will put her in good humor again.

MME. BERNARD. Poor woman! My son says her moral sense is—underdeveloped.

MARIE. Your son holds her up to a rather difficult standard—and that standard is right under his eyes! Mme. Fourchambault is as honest as the average, you may be sure. Doubtless she is one of

those people who like to deceive themselves. But she's really a very good sort of woman—with good business sense, except that sometimes she changes her monomanias!

MME. BERNARD. I see: obstinate and changeable at the same time.

MARIE. That's about it. She is like a spoiled child; we must forgive her and admit that she has compensating qualities!

MME. BERNARD. What are they?

MARIE. I'm thinking.

MME. BERNARD. Well, she accommodates herself to everyone!—Is her husband happy with her?

MARIE. I think so: he's not too particular. He's so good!—Good, the way bread is good! It's his fate to be eaten! He lets himself be devoured without a single complaint: he's ground up into tiny crumbs!

MME. BERNARD. Why do you make fun of the poor man? That's not kind of you.

MARIE. It doesn't prevent my loving him, anyway!

(*Enter BERNARD.*)

BERNARD. (*Aside*) Marie! (*To MARIE*) How are you, Mademoiselle? (*He goes to the table*)

MARIE. How are you, M. Bernard?

MME. BERNARD. (*Leaving the sofa and going to her son*) Has Chauvet come?

BERNARD. Yes, he's going to take dinner with us to-night.

MME. BERNARD. Is he well?

BERNARD. (*Laying some papers on the table*) Oh, yes. (*To MARIE*) Papa Fourchambault *isn't* doing well, is he?

MARIE. How is that?

MME. BERNARD. Is he sick?

BERNARD. Not he! His business!—He's about to suspend payment.

MARIE. My God!

MME. BERNARD. Poor man!

BERNARD. (*To MARIE*) Didn't you know?

MARIE. No one in the family knows anything about it. The poor people!

BERNARD. He didn't want to confess he was ruined until the last resource failed.

MME. BERNARD. He was caught in that dreadful failure of Cartier Brothers, wasn't he?

BERNARD. He has 240,000 francs of their notes.

MME. BERNARD. And will he go bankrupt for so small a sum? The great House of Fourchambault!

BERNARD. Most of which must have been exterior decoration.

MME. BERNARD. His wife ruined him.

BERNARD. Shouldn't wonder!—The poor fellow is trying everywhere to get money—no one will let him have a sou. The very fact that he wants to borrow makes everyone suspicious; they had no idea he was so near disaster!

MARIE. But his friends——?

MME. BERNARD. They are in danger, too, because of him—or pretend to be—and are only too glad to find a pretext for refusing to help him.

MARIE. Oh, Madame! Do you mean that this honest man cannot find a single friend who will risk something to save his honor? —

BERNARD. In business there are no friends!

MARIE. He has at least one! My farm is sold; I'm going to get 40,000 francs——

MME. BERNARD. Would you do that? That's a kind deed, my child!

BERNARD. It'll be only a drop in the bucket.

MARIE. That's so! But drops of water make rivers!

BERNARD. You seem to be deeply concerned for the honor of that family!

MARIE. Monsieur, I am. They took me in when I was in trouble, and I'll not leave them when they are in danger. If I'm the only one who will help them—I who have known them for so short a time—so much the worse for the others! I'll see you later! (*She goes out*)

BERNARD. But, Mademoiselle—

MME. BERNARD. Let her do it.

BERNARD. Why do you say that?

MME. BERNARD. It's so good to see a kind act! Besides, that will cost nothing: someone else is going to save M. Fourchambault!

BERNARD. (*Indifferently*) Yes? Who?

MME. BERNARD. (*Supplicating him*) You!

BERNARD. I? No! A thousand times no! I have no 40,000 francs to throw into the street!

MME. BERNARD. I ask you.

BERNARD. What's this man to you—? You don't even know him?

MME. BERNARD. (*Ill at ease*) Do I need to know him? Marie's affection for him is sufficient to show that he deserves the help of any honest person. Should we be less generous than that poor child?

BERNARD. (*Crossly*) I'm not in love with M. Leopold!—If I did give in to this idea of yours, I should be only postponing Fourchambault's ruin. It will be so much the worse when it does come. With a wife like his—he can't keep her from squandering—his position will always be as precarious as it has been; more so: his credit won't be good.

MME. BERNARD. (*Meditating*) That is true, we can't take half-way measures; that house needs to be ruled with an iron hand: yours! I don't ask you to do that, I command you!

BERNARD. Do you want me to go into partnership with that fool?

MME. BERNARD. That's the only way you could really be in control and put things in order.

BERNARD. Why, this is absurd! If it's only a question of money, I—don't object! But how can I manage his private affairs?

MME. BERNARD. (*Rising to her full height*) You must. I wish it. It is your duty.

BERNARD. (*After a pause*) That man is my father.

MME. BERNARD. Yes.

BERNARD. Do you still love him?

MME. BERNARD. (*Simply*) No; but he is the only man I ever did love. I—beg you!

BERNARD. I shall do everything you ask; I shall look after his welfare as if it were my own. (MME. BERNARD *takes his hand and presses it to her lips*) But I don't have to tell him that I am his son, do I?

MME. BERNARD. No, certainly not! What would be the use? (*They sit side by side, his hand in hers*)

BERNARD. Good, but when I'm his partner, how can I prevent his coming here?

MME. BERNARD. My rooms are on a separate floor, you know.

BERNARD. He'll ask to meet you.

MME. BERNARD. You can tell him I never meet anyone; you can pretend that I object to your partnership.

BERNARD. But what if he should meet you some time, by accident? He might be coming in with me?

MME. BERNARD. He would not recognize me now. I thought of all these things before I let you settle in Le Havre. Once when you were in town on business, I arranged a meeting with M. Fourchambault.

BERNARD. And didn't he recognize you?

MME. BERNARD. He had not seen me for thirty

46 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

years: my face had changed, and my name was not the same.

BERNARD. And he was preoccupied at the time! His rich marriage didn't succeed! Poor man! What a family! There he is, his wife despising him and his children with no respect for him! How much better if he had married you!

MME. BERNARD. You forget: he thought I was to blame.

BERNARD. (*Shrugging his shoulders*) Oh, now! now!—Like many another, he chose to act according to conventional morality, not the real, lasting morality. He got his just punishment. Far be it from me to condemn him. It's good for him.

MME. BERNARD. Bernard!

BERNARD. Then it isn't good for him!—I'll get that 200,000 francs from the bank——

MME. BERNARD. Two hundred and forty thousand.

BERNARD. That's so, he must pay back Marie. Dear child! It was a splendid action! (*Kissing his mother*) I—adore you! (*He goes out, back*)

MME. BERNARD. (*She stands with upturned eyes*) God be praised!

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE: *The drawing-room in the FOURCHAMBAULTS' home in Le Havre. At the back there is a mantel-piece between two windows. There is a door on either side of the room, up-stage, and one down-stage to the right. Down-stage to the left is a table. Two double*

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT. 47

chairs are near the mantel-piece; a small sofa, center; another table, right.

LEOPOLD *is alone.*

LEOPOLD. (*He has his hat on, and is putting on his gloves. Looking at the clock*) Three o'clock! Why should I go to the office? Well, to satisfy Father! (*He yawns*) Doesn't take me long to get used to doing without the club! I made up for lost sleep last night! To bed at five A. M., and up at two in the afternoon—that's just right. Didn't sleep very well, though: dreamed that Maïa was married to that pirate of the high seas. I was furious at the thought! (*He yawns again*) I'm fearfully empty! Oh, of course: I haven't had lunch! (*He rings the bell, and a servant appears at the left*) Bring me a glass of Malaga and some biscuits—a lot of biscuits——

(*The SERVANT goes out. Enter BLANCHE, right. She wears the same dress as in the second act, and carries a riding-whip, wrapped in paper.*)

BLANCHE. Here we are!

LEOPOLD. We? Who?

BLANCHE. Mother and I, of course. Oh, you needn't look for her, she's not hidden in my skirt. She went straight to her room, where the notary is waiting. He has some important news for her. (*She sits on the sofa*)

LEOPOLD. It's probably about the contract.

BLANCHE. Probably. Guess where we've been?

LEOPOLD. At Mme. Rastiboulois', of course.

BLANCHE. No! Between last night's dinner and to-night's theater I haven't as yet been consumed with a desire to see my mother-in-law to-be.

LEOPOLD. Mother should have been.

BLANCHE. She was—a little bit, but I dissuaded

her. It was not easy, she's like a little child. She thinks she's a baroness and a prefect's wife at the same time. If this marriage were to fall through, she'd go into a decline.

LEOPOLD. But it can't, matters have gone so far! If you haven't come from the Prefecture, where on earth have you come from?

BLANCHE. Mme. Bernard's.

LEOPOLD. Ha! Ha! What sort of person is she?

BLANCHE. Very distinguished-looking. You've lost your bet, poor old Leopold. I've been wanting a riding-whip, so I bought this on my way home. They'll send you the bill.

LEOPOLD. Don't put that among your wedding-presents: it might remind you of your husband-to-be!

BLANCHE. He hasn't anything to fear—if he doesn't begin again.

(Enter the SERVANT, carrying a bottle of Malaga and some biscuits on a tray.)

SERVANT. There, Monsieur!

BLANCHE. For you? Are you just having lunch?

LEOPOLD. *(Sitting down and dipping a biscuit into the wine)* This is the first thing I've had to-day.

BLANCHE. Why, Germain told us you were to take lunch in town.

LEOPOLD. I instructed him to tell that pious lie—then I went to sleep again.

BLANCHE. Lazy! We didn't come home so late last night!

LEOPOLD. I know; but I'm not sure whether it was the bad champagne or the strange bed——

BLANCHE. It must have been the bed! It's a long time since you slept on the carpet—you must be nearly dead!

LEOPOLD. What do you mean?

BLANCHE. Will you wager that you didn't spend the night at the club? Ten louis!

LEOPOLD. Together with the fifty I lost, makes sixty! No, thanks!

BLANCHE. After such splendid resolutions! What weather-cocks men are!

LEOPOLD. Well, Miss Preacher, for your edification let me state that what I did was a noble deed. It seems that Maïa has been slightly compromised by my patriarchal manners; now, as it is not in my character to compromise ladies——

BLANCHE. You prefer to ruin them?

LEOPOLD. (*Nervously*) Yes! (*Correcting himself*) What are you talking about, child?

BLANCHE. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, it just slipped out. I thought I was a week older than I am; in a week, you know, I'll have the right to say things I ought not to think to-day. (*Enter MARIE, right. She stands by the door*) Funny, isn't it?

LEOPOLD. Yes, very.

MARIE. (*Aside*) I wonder if they know yet?—Has your father come in?

LEOPOLD. No, he's at the office—where I'm not! (*The clock strikes*) Half past! What a row I'm in for! Pray for me, Maïa. (*He goes out*)

BLANCHE. Fool! He's kept me here half an hour: I'll fix my hair and be back at once. (*She goes out, right, down-stage*)

MARIE. (*Standing near the mantel-piece*) M. Fourchambault's absence can mean only bad news! Poor people! What a blow!

(*Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, at the back. He crosses the stage in silence, and sits, down-stage, on one of the double chairs. MARIE goes to him.*)

MARIE. Well, have you found it?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What?

MARIE. What you were looking for? I know all about your trouble!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Do the others here know it?

MARIE. Not yet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, I've found nothing.

MARIE. I was luckier than you: I've found forty thousand francs for you. (*She opens a small pocket-book and takes some bank-notes from it*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. Where did you get these?

MARIE. (*Lowering her eyes*) From someone who doesn't want his name known!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How can I give him a receipt?

MARIE. He doesn't want one: he trusts you.

FOURCHAMBAULT. How can I repay him?

MARIE. I'll take it to him.

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Rising, deeply touched*) Take it to him now: these forty thousand francs can't save me. He can make better use of them than I can! *She is too generous not to be poor!* (*Taking MARIE's hands in his*) Thank you, dear child, I appreciate this! But keep your little fortune, I don't need it. I am going to do the only thing I can do: ask Mme. Fourchambault.

MARIE. What?

FOURCHAMBAULT. She is rich. I have no right to touch her personal fortune without her consent. I know she'll force me to pay a high rate for my money, but there's nothing else to do. And yet my present condition is due to her. I've been anything but happy!

MARIE. And it's a little *your* fault, too.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I know that. My wife is really not so much to blame; I've been too indulgent toward her. I somehow can't bear to refuse anything—and then, I detest argument. See how my hand is trembling! I'm afraid to face my wife!

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 51

MARIE. Courage! She can't refuse.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Here she is.

(*Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT, down-stage right.*)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, Monsieur, was I so wrong when I advised you to let Leopold take care of your business? Stay, Marie! If you had only listened to me, we shouldn't be where we are to-day!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How could Leopold have done better than I?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Never mind that. I could prove it too easily—only I don't like to strike a man when he's down. I blame you for one thing only: you should have spoken to me instead of to strangers, and letting the whole town find out about the terrible condition your business was in. You make people think your wife has no heart, no sense! I can't forgive you for that.

MARIE. (*Aside to FOURCHAMBAULT*) What did I say?

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To his wife*) I confess I was wrong. But Maïa will tell you that I was going to ask you for the help you are generous enough to offer.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I? I'm not offering you anything! This morning I should have, but now, what's the use? Everyone knows about it. All my money couldn't save you now—my notary just told me.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Then do you want me to file for bankruptcy? I should never survive the shame!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm just as ashamed as you! Such a pitiful little bankruptcy! Well, the only thing to think of now is for the children's future——

MARIE. And—honor?

52 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not a question of honor. M. Fourchambault will have to give way to force—as my notary said.

MARIE. But if you are still rich after he is bankrupt, the dishonor will be yours.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. My dear child, you're a little savage. Such things as this occur every day in Europe; we aren't quite so quixotic as you seem to think we should be! No one would blame us!

MARIE. Except your husband—and his creditors. Savage or not, Madame, the man whose name I bear never need be ashamed so long as I have independent means to help him!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Drily*) A fine theory!

FOURCHAMBAULT. She offered me all her fortune.

MARIE. And I offer it again.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) Can she be fishing for a husband? It's very nice, Mademoiselle, and does you credit, but I am first and foremost a mother. He's asking me for my children's dowry. I refuse.

(*Enter LEOPOLD. He overhears his mother's last words.*)

LEOPOLD. (*Quickly*) Refuse for my sister, but not for me!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. This is the last straw!

LEOPOLD. You are the only one who can save us! I don't understand why you hesitate?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To throw the little we have into the street, where your father has thrown the rest?

LEOPOLD. Don't blame him.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Whom should I blame? He's lacked business "go" all his life, and now he lacks commonsense!

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 53

LEOPOLD. (*Forcefully*) What you call lack of business "go" was merely friendly confidence in the business men of Le Havre; what you call lack of commonsense, I call his business honor—the honor of our family, and I thank him for protecting it! Father, you needn't be ashamed, your children are with you!

FOURCHAMBAULT. My son!

MARIE. Good, Léopold!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If we allow our feelings to get the better of us, everything is lost. Don't mix sentiment with business—as my notary said. You may all be against me; I'll take matters in hand for everybody in this house. I'm the only one who can manage. Some day you'll thank me.

LEOPOLD. But, Mother——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's my last word.

SERVANT. (*Announcing*) Monsieur Bernard.

LEOPOLD. A visit, at this time!

(*Enter BERNARD. He is very nervous, and stops at the door. LEOPOLD goes to him.*)

LEOPOLD. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but you have interrupted a family conference.

BERNARD. I shall not be in the way. (*To FOURCHAMBAULT*) I understand, Monsieur, that you need two hundred and forty thousand francs? I have the money here.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Monsieur——?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) What luck!

LEOPOLD. (*Aside*) I'd rather be under obligations to any other man on earth!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To BERNARD*) The moment those whom I had a right to count on fail me, you, Monsieur, who owe me nothing—God bless you! You—have saved my life!

LEOPOLD. Your life?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Do you imagine I should have lived after this disgrace?

BERNARD. (*Aside*) A man of honor!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How grateful I am, Monsieur!

BERNARD. (*Coldly*) There is no question of gratitude, Monsieur. This is not a favor, but simply a matter of business.

LEOPOLD. (*Aside*) That's better!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Sitting on a chair, left, and motioning BERNARD to sit down*) Two birds with one stone, then!

BERNARD. This is what I propose: I believe that the House of Fourchambault can be put on its feet again, and I offer to become not your creditor, but your partner. What do you say to that?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What do I say? Your money is welcome, but your name—! Why, that alone would be enough to give me full credit again, and then your energy and experience——

BERNARD. Good! Then you accept?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I should think I do! (*He shakes hands with BERNARD; BERNARD hesitates a moment before taking FOURCHAMBAULT's hand*)

BERNARD. (*Rising*) Done! A hand-shake before the contract, like the immersion at home before the baptism.* Introduce me at your office to-day as your partner.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Allow the family to thank you sincerely, Monsieur!

LEOPOLD. (*Coldly*) I trust, Monsieur, that you will find the arrangement as profitable for yourself as for us!

BERNARD. (*Coldly*) I make the offer in that hope. Shall we go into your office, M. Fourcham-

* In France it is often customary for the parents to baptize their child formally, at home, before the church ceremony.

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 55

bault? We have some important matters to discuss.

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Leading the way*) This way, please!

BERNARD. (*To MARIE, who shakes his hand warmly, in the passage-way*) Are you glad?

MARIE. Oh, yes!

(BERNARD and FOURCHAMBAULT go out, left.)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What splendid luck!

MARIE. To think he was so near all the time! And we never suspected! When I think of what M. Fourchambault said he would have done——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I shouldn't have let him do that! Poor man! I had to summon up all my courage to refuse him! Now all's well that ends well—oh, no: everything's not ended!

LEOPOLD. What's the matter?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Your sister's marriage?

LEOPOLD. Are you afraid they'll want to break it off?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The House of Fourchambault is under a cloud!

LEOPOLD. It will come out soon!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I hope so, but between a house under a cloud, and one in full prosperity, like the Duhamels'——

LEOPOLD. The Baron is too proud to break off for a matter of money!

MARIE. Madame means that it would be more gracious to give them a chance of refusing?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I? I don't mean that at all!

LEOPOLD. Well, you are wrong and Marie is perfectly right. We ought to give them the chance.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And what if the Baron accepts?

56 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

LEOPOLD. He will do a shameful and dishonorable deed: that's all.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's all? And what about Blanche?

MARIE. I really think she wouldn't regret the loss!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That isn't the question: the banns are published, the invitations sent out for the signing of the contract, the trousseau linen is all marked—with a crown!

LEOPOLD. Take off the crown!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. People will laugh at us!

LEOPOLD. Let them laugh! They'd rather make fun of the prefect! You know France! And then, what of it? Let us act honorably, no matter what happens. Father will have to go to the prefecture, and the sooner the better——

GERMAIN. (*Announcing*) M. le baron Rastiboulois.

LEOPOLD. The Baron!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. So soon!

(*Enter RASTIBOULOIS.*)

RASTIBOULOIS. What is this I hear, my poor friends? May I speak before Mademoiselle?

LEOPOLD. She is one of the family!

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Aside*) So they say!—Believe me when I say that no one is so sorry about this misfortune that has come to you! My son is hard hit by the blow: he loved Mademoiselle Blanche so deeply!

LEOPOLD. Loved? He doesn't love her any longer, then?

RASTIBOULOIS. I don't say that—but you understand——?

LEOPOLD. We understand so well that my father

was about to give you the opportunity of refusing. We regret your being put to the trouble of coming first!

RASTIBOULOIS. I should have expected no less from you.

LEOPOLD. But we should have expected more from your sense of courtesy.

RASTIBOULOIS. Oh, I——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. In a word, you wish to break off the match?

RASTIBOULOIS. Alas, Madame, as a father, as a magistrate, as a gentleman——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought you were above monetary considerations!

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Rather sharply*) Ah, money! Your ruin would if anything have brought us closer together: the only question in my mind heretofore was the disparity of our fortunes. I have said that continually, shouted it from the house-tops, and in the streets of Le Havre. What would Le Havre say now, what would all France say if Rastiboulois were to take back his word like the lowest of serfs? No, no, Madame, if I withdraw now it is solely because bankruptcy stares you in the face!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Bankruptcy? I don't understand?

RASTIBOULOIS. Why, M. Fourchambault's——?

LEOPOLD. There is no question of bankruptcy, Monsieur.

RASTIBOULOIS. (*In consternation*) What? Isn't your father about to suspend payment?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Who told you that?

RASTIBOULOIS. Why—your notary, Madame, who is likewise my own.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To-morrow we shall open our doors as usual. All payments will be made.

58 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

RASTIBOULOIS. Indeed! Oh, I'm charmed, charmed——

MARIE. (*Aside*) That's not hard to see!

RASTIBOULOIS. Madame, you are making a great and noble sacrifice!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. There is no sacrifice at all, Monsieur!

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Stupefied*) Then you are not paying the deficit? Who is?

LEOPOLD. M. Bernard.

RASTIBOULOIS. M. Bernard!

LEOPOLD. Who has just entered into partnership with my father.

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Agreeably surprised*) Partnership?! Ah, that's different! Why didn't you tell me at once? This good fortune you have richly deserved, my dear friends! That's a bit of news that will take the wind out of the sails of the Duhamels! I shan't be sorry; they haven't been very friendly to you in this business, I tell you. Ha! Ha! They thought they would be alone in the field now! Ha! Ha! I can see their faces when they hear M. Bernard is your partner——

LEOPOLD. Silent partner.

RASTIBOULOIS. What is his share in the business? What did he put in?

LEOPOLD. Two hundred and forty thousand francs.

RASTIBOULOIS. No more? You know the partner can't be held for more than he has originally paid?

LEOPOLD. And for that reason we are giving you the chance of refusing a second time.

MARIE. But what would Le Havre say? What would France say?

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Drily*) Mademoiselle, I am glad I was told you were of the family. (*To himself*) Fool! She could have got me out of this

beautifully!—France will say, my jocose young friend, that Rastiboulois is faithful to his motto: “One heart, one promise.” I have given both, Madame, and I take back neither.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Ah, Baron, I have found the real Baron again!

RASTIBOULOIS. On the field of honor—as always!

MARIE. (*Aside*) Too much plume!*

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Hypocritically*) I cannot tell you, my dear friends, my—relatives, how happy I am over the outcome of this little conference! I wish Fourchambault were here; I’d like to take him in my arms.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. He is conferring with his partner.

RASTIBOULOIS. Oh, don’t disturb him. To-night we’ll have a time of it: don’t forget, I am taking you all to the theater!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. We shan’t forget, never fear!

RASTIBOULOIS. I hope Mlle. Letellier will give me the pleasure of joining the company?

MARIE (*Formally*) Too good of you, Monsieur.

RASTIBOULOIS. Not at all—it’s merely a hobby of mine: a horticulturist who delights in collecting roses!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Please, Baron!

LEOPOLD. (*Aside*) Fool!

RASTIBOULOIS. (*Bowing*) Madame! ’Till this evening, Mademoiselle.

MARIE. Thank you, Monsieur.

* An allusion to a famous saying of Henri IV, to the effect that he was always to be found upon the field of honor—“sur le chemin de l’honneur”—and might be distinguished by his plume: “panache.”

60 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

RASTIBOULOIS. I thank you! (*Aside*) Yes, I do! (*He goes out*)

LEOPOLD. I'm sorry the trousseau linen is marked!

MARIE. Poor child! What good are all her attainments if she's to be bartered like that?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. This is Europe, my dear.

MARIE. What a fine European your Baron is! If he thinks I'm going to accept his invitation——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Why did you appear to accept it just now?

MARIE. He accepted for me. You'll excuse me to-night, won't you?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If you like.

LEOPOLD. Excuse me, too, will you?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No, not you.

LEOPOLD. I didn't sleep a wink last night!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Neither did I, but that's no reason. (*Aside*) He wants to stay alone with her!—Listen to me: come to my box, if only for fifteen minutes.

LEOPOLD. I can't refuse that.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Taking him aside*) And remember your grandfather's wise words: "The worst sin is to marry a girl without a dowry."

(*Enter FOURCHAMBAULT and BERNARD.*)

BERNARD. Ah, here we are. (*To LEOPOLD and MARIE*) We have to confer with Mme. Fourchambault.

LEOPOLD. Does M. Bernard think I'm too young?

BERNARD. Stay if you like!

LEOPOLD. I'd rather go. (*Offering his hand to MARIE*) I'm very glad, Mademoiselle, to be driven from this—paradise!

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 61

(BERNARD shrugs his shoulders.)

MARIE. (*Smiling*) A paradise—but without the apple!

LEOPOLD. Unfortunately!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) Little impudence! (LEOPOLD and MARIE go out)

FOURCHAMBAULT. Speak, M. Bernard.

BERNARD. You have the floor, Monsieur.

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, you.

BERNARD. Very well. We have gone over the whole situation, Madame, and are agreed on the first point: the necessity for a modification of your household arrangements.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To her husband*) What, modify my household arrangements?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, my dear; M. Bernard thinks that certain economies——

BERNARD. To sum the matter up: you spend one hundred and twenty thousand francs a year; we believe that you can do very well—keep your house on a very respectable and honorable footing—with forty thousand.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. With forty thousand! Tell me how, Monsieur?

BERNARD. Gladly, Madame: it's very simple. You now have six horses, ten servants, a house at Le Havre, a villa at Ingouville——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Throwing her keys on the table*) There are my keys, Monsieur! That's the simplest way of all!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Now, now, now, don't get angry——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If I have to bow down to a stranger in my own house——

FOURCHAMBAULT. M. Bernard is not a stranger, he is my partner. He is defending our common interests—it is his right.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And what rights have I? Didn't I bring you eight hundred thousand francs when I married you? Is it right for you to reduce our expenses to forty thousand francs a year—only the interest on my dowry? Do you think it's just to live on me?

BERNARD. Oh, Madame, I am defending your husband's and your own rights as well as you are, and preserving your husband's dignity. Let us just see what this dowry amounts to; you make a great point of it. It seems that M. Fourchambault neither cares for nor can afford this annual expenditure of a hundred and twenty thousand francs.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, no!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Between her teeth*) Coward!

BERNARD. Of these a hundred and twenty thousand francs, you supply forty thousand. Your husband therefore, spends eighty thousand francs a year. Now, he has done this for about thirty years. Figure up how many times you have spent your dowry, and then let us drop the subject.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Going to her husband*) What's this?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Just three times, my dear.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Astonished*) Oh!

BERNARD. M. Fourchambault will make you out a budget which we shall arrange, and upon which we shall be ready to hear your opinion.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I won't let you have it, Monsieur!

BERNARD. So much the better. Now, Monsieur, let us carry our money to your cashier for his payments to-morrow. At your service, Madame. (*He opens the door at the back, right, and awaits FOURCHAMBAULT*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. 'Till later, dear. (*Aside*) Poor, poor dear! (*They go out*)

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 63

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Angrily*) That Bernard! The brutal—! (*Sentimentally*) That's the kind of husband I ought to have had!

Curtain

ACT IV

SCENE: *Same as Act III.* MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and a SERVANT are present.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Ask M. Léopold to come here a moment.

SERVANT. Monsieur has gone riding with Mlle. Blanche and Mlle Letellier.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Good. Well, then, when they return! (*The SERVANT goes out*) They wanted to say good-bye to the stables. Poor children! That Maïa seems set on trotting around after my son. Of course, Blanche is with them—! But people are so suspicious nowadays! We can't afford to have any more gossip at this time. Hm! only last night the Prefect made me say more than I intended.

(*Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, right.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, dear, how do you like your finance minister? And the budget?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Rising*) Not at all.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ha! But last night it seemed that the Prefect had pretty well convinced you of the advantage of Bernard's reforms! You know I have cut down only as much as I had to.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is exactly what I object to. Somehow you can never be reasonable,

you can't do things by halves. Last night the Prefect made a very profound remark—it would do you good to remember it: there are only two things which can keep up appearances for a business founded on credit: parsimony or prodigality.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very profound, indeed. But you see, I wanted to make the transition easier for you.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No transition! Here's another thing the Prefect said: You who were once the Mother of the Graces, become now the Mother of the Gracchi!*

FOURCHAMBAULT. I don't see the point.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It's clear enough: after having reigned as Queen of Fashion, I must compensate the brilliancy of my reign by the brilliancy of my abdication. I want people to see me pass through the streets, on foot, in a plain woolen dress, and I want them to say: There is the woman who wishes no other jewels than her children.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Now I see!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Giving him the papers she has been holding*) That's good. Now you may reduce the budget: toilette, carriages, footmen——

FOURCHAMBAULT. We mustn't go to extremes—we should keep at least one carriage and one horse.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No, no—no shabby-genteel respectability! Nothing middle-class! We have sufficiently noble connections not to blush for our aristocratic simplicity.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But a carriage for a banker is economy.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Just as it is for a doctor. Well, I don't believe in professional carriages. Take a cab when you need one.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, my dearest——

* An attempted pun on "Graces," and "Gracques."

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 65

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Are *you* objecting to these reforms now? I shall speak to M. Bernard.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'll take the cab!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And don't forget to cancel the lease for our villa at Ingouville—to-day! You know to-morrow will be too late—you mustn't renew the lease.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, they will renew it as a matter of course. I'll write a letter to the proprietor.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course we have the right to sublet this house——

FOURCHAMBAULT. I don't want you to be deprived of everything.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Poverty from now on is going to be my luxury. On my grave I want the words: "She stayed at home; she wore cotton."

FOURCHAMBAULT. Your grave, dear! You're far from that!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Who knows? Our bodies are frail—I feel that.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Nonsense!

(Enter BLANCHE, at the back, in riding-clothes, a wallet slung over her shoulders.)

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Alone? Where is Léopold? And Maïa?

BLANCHE. *(Sitting to the left of the table)* I beat them by a mile! Of course, I had Roland!

FOURCHAMBAULT. *(Pointing to the wallet)* What's that?

BLANCHE. Paper wallet.—We've been playing a game—Rally Papers! It was such fun!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Rally Papers? What's that?

BLANCHE. *(Laying her whip on the table.—To her mother)* Shall I tell him?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh! I don't care!

66 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

BLANCHE. (*To FOURCHAMBAULT*) Sort of chase: one rider is a deer; he's given five minutes' start. He has a bag of papers which he throws away as he rides: that's the trail. He's got to put the hounds off the scent, see? I was the deer, and I escaped the others. They're looking for me up hill and down dale!

(*Enter MARIE, left, in street-costume.*)

BLANCHE. (*Rising*) Here already? And changed so soon?

MARIE. I gave up when I lost the scent. I came back by a short-cut.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And Léopold?

MARIE. I left him arguing with his horse at the edge of a ditch. They may have come to an understanding by now. I don't know!

BLANCHE. And I thought I was being pursued! I wasn't. That's funny, isn't it?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The child is wet through with perspiration. Quick, go and change. (*She conducts BLANCHE to the door, left*)

BLANCHE. Don't bother.

FOURCHAMBAULT. She'll ring for Justine.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What, leave my child in mercenary hands?

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Aside*) Cornelia!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To BLANCHE*) Quick! Don't get cold! (*To her husband*) Don't forget to write to the landlord!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Going to the right*) At once! (*MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and BLANCHE go out, left. Aside*) If I had to choose my pose, I'd choose the one she's taking now. At least, it's cheaper than the other! (*He sends a kiss to MARIE, who has remained at the door, back. Then he goes out, right*)

MARIE. (*Following FOURCHAMBAULT with her eyes*) The dear good man! I am profoundly happy to be able to help save him! How grateful I am to M. Bernard! He has a good heart! (*To LEOPOLD, who enters at the back*) At last!

LEOPOLD. I'm very angry!

MARIE. At the horse?

LEOPOLD. No, at you.

MARIE. What have I done?

LEOPOLD. Take advantage of me, and gallop off full speed, making a face at me—do you think that was nice?

MARIE. I admit the face wasn't nice, but really, you were too funny!

LEOPOLD. You're just proud because your horse *would* leap without being urged. While mine—! An everyday occurrence!

MARIE. But what isn't of everyday occurrence is a ditch that cuts in half a declaration of love: a gallant lover punctuating his tender advances with "Whoa! Get up, there!" while the amazon laughs at him. You must admit that's funny—your leaving that declaration at the bottom of the ditch.

LEOPOLD. What if it attempted to climb out?

MARIE. I have a magic formula to send it back.

LEOPOLD. I confess I was a bit ridiculous; but what I felt for you was not: that is deep and sincere. You hadn't been here three days before I fairly quivered—and to-day——

MARIE. Whoa!—Go on!

LEOPOLD. No—I can't—now!

MARIE. In the ditch? What did I tell you?

LEOPOLD. I hate you!

MARIE. (*Sitting down by the table*) This is no more true than what you said before.

LEOPOLD. Which is as much saying that you believe me incapable of a single serious thought?

MARIE. Yes, little Léopold!

LEOPOLD. What if I should prove some day that I am serious?

MARIE. Oh, then I shouldn't laugh at you.

LEOPOLD. What proof do you want, if all I have given you are not enough?

MARIE. What proof—? Oh, I don't know——

LEOPOLD. But—you—you've completely changed me. What all the arguments of my family have failed to accomplish, you have done—a single look from you did the work. If you knew what a useless sort of fellow I was before I met you, you would be very proud of your influence over me. You don't think that's much, do you? I beg to differ. No matter how humble the creature, it is a wonderful thing to have brought it into being—and this creature is of your own making. You have made a new man of me.

MARIE. In any event I have done you a good turn.

LEOPOLD. (*Sitting near her*) One that will make me unhappy forever, if you refuse to love me. Oh, my dear Maïa! Don't despise your work—finish it; you can with a single word.

MARIE. Are you really serious?

LEOPOLD. Very!

MARIE. My dear friend, you are out of your mind! What would your mother say if she heard you?

LEOPOLD. She doesn't, and she shan't! I'll hide my happiness from her, from the whole world! (*MARIE listens to the rest of what LEOPOLD says, with downcast eyes, her eyebrows contracted*) Oh, Maïa! This union, so free, so mysterious! Think of the joy of overriding the silly conventions and prejudices of society—to belong to one another! What a dream! Say that one word, dearest, and my life is yours! (*He kneels at her feet*)

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 69

MARIE. (*Irritated, rising abruptly*) Stand up! (*LEOPOLD gets up. She looks at him for an instant, and shrugs her shoulders*) You are foolish, poor Leopold! And we were such good friends!

LEOPOLD. Sh! Father!

(*Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, with a letter.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. You here! Good! I want you to saddle your horse.

LEOPOLD. But I've just been riding.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ride again. Secret errand. Take this letter to Ingouville, give it to the proper person, and wait for an answer.

LEOPOLD. Very well, Papa. (*Aside*) She made a face, then! (*He goes out at the back*)

MARIE. (*Aside*) It was bound to come to that!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Rubbing his hands*) Reforms, my dear Maïa, reforms! My wife is more eager for them than I. Bernard has only to suggest. What a man, my dear! What a man!

MARIE. Then I leave you in safe hands. I go with no misgivings.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Are you thinking of leaving us?

MARIE. I must; the sooner the better.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Because we are forced to economize?

MARIE. No, my friend, but I must think of my future.

(*BERNARD appears at the back.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Not seeing BERNARD*) We'll see to getting you a situation.

BERNARD. (*Advancing, to FOURCHAMBAULT*) Good! (*To MARIE*) It's found!

70 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MARIE. (*Rising*) Thank you! It couldn't have turned out better!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ungrateful!

MARIE. No, not ungrateful, but reasonable and resolute!

BERNARD. But you must leave France, and go to England.

MARIE. (*Surprised*) Is it so advantageous?

BERNARD. I should not have mentioned it if I weren't quite sure I was putting you into the hands of an exceptionally good and honorable family. I have not relied merely on hearsay, I myself have investigated. I have been talking things over during the past week with Sir John Sunter.

FOURCHAMBAULT. The owner of the yacht?

BERNARD. (*Smiling*) I am the owner of the yacht.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You buy yachts, then? Like my wife? What the devil's the use of that?

BERNARD. So far, it has served to make the acquaintance of Sir John Sunter.

MARIE. How obliging you are, M. Bernard.

BERNARD. I shall also be in a position to visit Brighton from time to time, and see how our young friend likes her young pupils.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ah! Personally, I am subject to sea-sickness, but I hope you'll take me along from time to time.

MARIE. Thank you, thank you, my dear kind friends! You give me courage to go into exile. When must I give my answer?

BERNARD. You have twenty-four hours to think the matter over.

MARIE. I shall consider it well.

BERNARD. And now, M. Fourchambault! (*To MARIE, who is about to leave*) No, you may stay! I understand the Prefect's son is going to marry your daughter?

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Sitting down at the table*) That's so: I forget to tell you. Pardon me, but so many things have been happening since yesterday——

BERNARD. You approve of this marriage?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Well—yes and no.

MARIE. (*Seated to the left of the table*) Mme. Fourchambault is very much attached to the idea.

BERNARD. (*Sitting down opposite FOURCHAMBAULT*) And you are going to sacrifice your daughter for the sake of your wife's vanity?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I beg your pardon, my friend, but really—do you pretend to be more interested in my daughter than either my wife or myself?

BERNARD. I have no right, of course, but my duty urges me to consider a splendid young man whom this marriage will drive to despair.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Who is that?

BERNARD. My associate, Victor Chauvet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought he was in Calcutta?

MARIE. He arrived here yesterday.

BERNARD. And that was the news he received when he landed. He came to me this morning, heart-broken, and told me. I knew nothing about it. I was deeply stirred to see him so grief-stricken. He loves your daughter, and I know he would make her happy.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm sure he would. But my wife won't listen to it! She supplies the dowry, you see!

BERNARD. But Chauvet asks for nothing—he'll take her without a dowry.

MARIE. (*Standing behind the table, to FOURCHAMBAULT*) Without a dowry!

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's a possible solution, but—no! Blanche loves the little Baron!

BERNARD. Impossible! Victor felt sure when

he left that she loved *him*, and Victor is no fool. Influence was doubtless brought to bear on the little girl—a baronetcy was dangled before her eyes——

FOURCHAMBAULT. I can't do anything!

BERNARD. No, but you can at least lay the facts before her, so that afterward she will have no right to blame you as an accomplice of her mother in this regrettable marriage.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Really, I am—you say things I should never have thought of.

MARIE. All the more reason for you to think now.

BERNARD. It's high time!

(*Enter BLANCHE.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*To BERNARD*) Here she is—you speak to her!

BERNARD. (*Rising*) If you like.—Mlle. Blanche?

BLANCHE. Monsieur?

BERNARD. Do you really love that little Rastiboulois?

BLANCHE. I think that hardly concerns you. (*Going to her father*) Why should he meddle in this affair?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Speak to him as you would to our best friend. Do you love your fiancé?

MARIE. *Can* she?

BLANCHE. Love is not indispensable. As marriage is the only thing open to a young lady, it makes very little difference who the husband happens to be. The career of baroness is rather attractive to me.

BERNARD. (*Ironically*) And the career of an honest woman is not?

BLANCHE. Is it impossible to be an honest woman and a baroness at the same time?

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 73

MARIE. No, if the lady loves the baron; otherwise——

BERNARD. But there are ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that she doesn't, and then!

FOURCHAMBAULT. M. Bernard!

BERNARD. Yes?

FOURCHAMBAULT. My friend, you shouldn't speak of such things before young ladies!

BERNARD. I should like to know why not?

FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not difficult to see you have no sister!

BERNARD. Heavens and earth! If I had, I should see that she knew what she was doing in becoming engaged! I hardly think I should make a delicate and dainty masterpiece of her by respecting the flower of ignorance while I kept from her all she ought to know! I should preach to her the law of love, pure, natural love, which should go hand in hand with marriage and the social law. I should say to her: "Try to be happy in order to remain honest, for happiness is half of virtue. Since a romance is necessary in a woman's life, make your husband and your children the hero."

BLANCHE. But I'm not romantic.

MARIE. At eighteen? You must have been severely frost-bitten! (*She makes BLANCHE sit down on a chair, left*)

BERNARD. (*To MARIE*) That's how it is in France, Mademoiselle! The young people affect materialism; they blush at being fanciful or romantic!

MARIE. So much the worse for them!

BERNARD. So much the worse, yes. The romance that is right, founded on reason, is the ideal which is based on truth—you come to realize that as you grow older.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Alas!

74 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

BERNARD. (*To FOURCHAMBAULT*) What amuses me is the way young ladies seem indignant at fortune-hunters.

BLANCHE. But aren't they right?

BERNARD. Yes, but they go about it the wrong way. Now, the young ladies are really as interested as the men—that is evident. Marriage for money or marriage for pride, it is always marriage for a motive of self-interest. Fortune-hunters or title-hunters—what's the difference?

MARIE. (*At BLANCHE'S right, with one hand on the back of her chair*) If you really thought about this, I am sure your heart could not but agree.

BERNARD. (*To the left of BLANCHE, with one hand on the chair*) Why don't you?

MARIE. If you don't insist on having a husband you love you surely cannot insist on *his* loving *you*? Are you ready to accept a life without tenderness and affection? Can you bear the thought of intimacy with a stranger? Doesn't the idea revolt you?

BERNARD. How sweet it must be to live in peace and security under the protection of a master who makes himself your slave!

MARIE. And to protect him against the discouragements of life!

BERNARD. Give him children who will carry on your existence in their own?

MARIE. And from whom will arise a second love for you both!

BERNARD. Believe me, my dear Blanche, marriage is the basest of human institutions when it is merely the union of two fortunes.

MARIE. And the greatest of divine institutions when it is the union of two souls.

(MARIE'S eyes meet the glance of BERNARD. They both look away, confused and silent.)

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 75

FOURCHAMBAULT. Take their advice, child! And take your old father's. There is a young man here who loves you.

BLANCHE. (*Quickly rising*) Has he come back?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yesterday. He told the whole story to Bernard this morning—and he wept!

BLANCHE. Poor boy!

FOURCHAMBAULT. *He* doesn't want your money! He is willing to marry you without a dowry, if your mother refuses to give you one.

BLANCHE. She needn't, then! That would be much better!

FOURCHAMBAULT. But we must at least have her consent.

BLANCHE. That will be hard to get, but M. Bernard can help us! (*To BERNARD*) You'll help us convert Mamma, won't you?

BERNARD. (*Affectionately*) If you are converted, that is all that is necessary. I'll go now and tell my mother, she is very much interested. As to Mme. Fourchambault, she will doubtless, and on good grounds, feel that I have somewhat gone beyond my rights as a partner. Your father must discuss the matter with her.

BLANCHE. (*To her father*) Have you the courage?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Have I? Good Lord! When my daughter's happiness is at stake, no woman shall make me swerve a hair's breadth!

BERNARD. Good, then you will see to getting Mme. Fourchambault's consent?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Leave that to me!

BERNARD. I'll return back to work, then. (*To MARIE*) You'll have your answer ready to-morrow, Mademoiselle?

MARIE. Yes, Monsieur.

(BERNARD goes out.)

76 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

BLANCHE. Now—do you know what I'm going to do if Mamma refuses to consent? I'm going quietly to the altar—the city-hall, that is—and after the mayor has made his pretty little sermon, I'll speak out in my clearest voice: No, no, no!

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's an idea! Perhaps that's the best way out of the difficulty.

BLANCHE. Don't you think so? Then you won't have to face Mamma! (*To MARIE*) He's afraid already.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Little stupid, you!

BLANCHE. Not so stupid as you think. Do you want us to stay and give you moral support?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, not at all; you would only be in the way. The conference may be a bit stormy, and children should be out of the way on such occasions. There's your mother now! Run off.

BLANCHE. Very well, Papa. (*They go out*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'd give a good deal to be an hour older. But, courage!—Here she is. The devil! She seems in a bad humor.

(*Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT, angrily, with a letter in her hand.*)

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's the matter, dear?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Handing him the letter*) Read!

FOURCHAMBAULT. From the Prefect?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. A messenger just brought it. Read it!

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Reading*) "Madame, I have braved public opinion so long as I believed that it was false. It was too painful to believe that you would tolerate a liaison under your own roof, for which your son was to blame. After your con-

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 77

fidences of last night, you will realize—" What confidences?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. How do I know? Go on.

FOURCHAMBAULT. (*Reading*) "You will realize that a union between our families has become impossible."—Then it's broken off?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The good-for-nothing!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Then Blanche is definitely thrown over?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Definitely.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And will be very hard to marry off!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. There is only one further possibility: M. Chauvet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Chauvet?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course: Chauvet! He landed only yesterday; my maid saw him this morning. Run at once and tell M. Bernard that I consent to give my daughter to his friend.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You? What about me?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Have you changed your mind?

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, but——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Then let's have no objections. There's not a minute to lose: I want the news of this engagement to be made public the moment people hear of the breaking-off of the other, do you understand? We'll think about Mlle. Letellier afterward.

FOURCHAMBAULT. She's been offered a situation in England.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's good. Let her accept, the sooner the better. Now, run to M. Bernard. I'll prepare Blanche for her required change of attitude. (*As she is about to go out, left*) Run! (*Aside, as she leaves*) Run, weather-cock!

78 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

FOURCHAMBAULT. That wasn't very hard!—
When you're dealing with women, you have merely
to know how to handle them!

Curtain

ACT V

SCENE: *Same as Act II.* MME. BERNARD is
sitting on a sofa, left, knitting a child's stock-
ing. BERNARD enters at back a moment later.

BERNARD. (*Throwing his hat down*) Curse it!

MME. BERNARD. What's the matter?

BERNARD. Oh—it was only to be expected:
Mlle. Letellier is in a bad situation.

MME. BERUARD. Bad?

BERNARD. The whole town is talking about her.
It seems that last night, at the Prefecture reception,
the Rastiboulois' officially announced their break-
ing-off with the Fourchambault's and managed to
whisper it about that it was quite impossible to
marry a young lady brought up in a home the
moral tone of which was at least open to criticism—
where a brother lived openly with his mistress,
and where a mother brazenly sanctioned the goings-
on—under her own roof!

MME. BERNARD. (*Rising*) That's not possible!
I can't believe it. You yourself seem a little too
ready to——

BERNARD. But there is no room for doubt, I am
sorry to say. That fool, Mme. Fourchambault, told
no end of secrets to the Baron: she told him the
whole story. And it's my fault! I should have got
Mlle. Letellier away from that place sooner! I
could see she was attracted by the little ape! I

relied too much on her power of resistance, and I took too much for granted with mother and son. Well, the evil's been done!

MME. BERNARD. What will become of her?

BERNARD. She is going to England. Of course, she hesitated before the prospect of that exile, but now she'll accept it willingly as a means of salvation. The scandal won't touch her when she's the other side of the Channel; it will die a natural death as soon as she leaves.

MME. BERNARD. He must have promised to marry her!

BERNARD. Yes, it's the tradition in that family!

MME. BERNARD. I am sure the father would have kept his promise if a loyal friend had only advised him, and told him of his duties toward me.

BERNARD. Perhaps *he* would have!

MME. BERNARD. Wouldn't you bless such a friend? (*Approaching her son*) Wouldn't you have considered him a happy man who could save a poor girl like that?

BERNARD. Of course.

MME. BERNARD. Then, my boy, you be that friend for Marie and for your brother.

BERNARD. (*With a little laugh*) My brother! That's true, he is! My brother! If you think a man like him would consent to marry her! Do you imagine his mother would let him marry a girl without a dowry!

MME. BERNARD. If that's the only objection—

(BERNARD *looks in astonishment at his mother, then sits down, his eyes lowered. A long silence.*)

BERNARD. (*Taking his mother's hand*) I'll do it—what you would have liked done in your own case.

80 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

MME. BERNARD. Thank you, dear boy.

A SERVANT. (*Announcing*) Mlle. Letellier.

BERNARD. (*Aside*) I wish I didn't have to meet her!

(*Enter MARIE, at the back. She bows to MME. BERNARD, who motions her to a chair. She then turns, surprised, to BERNARD, who bows formally to her.*)

MARIE. I have come to say good-bye, Madame. I have just reserved passage on a steamer leaving for l'Isle de Bourbon.

MME. BERNARD. Then you are not going to England?

MARIE. (*Bitterly*) No, Madame, Sir John Sunter refuses to take me.

BERNARD. (*Aside*) Well, that was to be expected.

MME. BERNARD. And what do you intend to do there?

MARIE. Who knows? God is merciful.

BERNARD. (*Advancing*) When does the steamer leave?

MARIE. At high-tide this evening.

BERNARD. Wait for me here. (*He goes out*)

MME. BERNARD. You mustn't give up hope, my poor Marie. My son is going to make M. Léopold keep his promise.

MARIE. What promise?

MME. BERNARD. To marry you.

MARIE. But he never said a word about it! I'll give him credit for declaring that his intentions were perfectly dishonorable!

MME. BERNARD. And in spite of that, you are——?

MARIE. His mistress? So they say.

MME. BERNARD. (*Rising*) But what do you say?

MARIE. (*Proudly*) Nothing! What is the good? Calumny is not worth refuting! One must either crush it or suffer under it. But to defend oneself without sufficient proofs of innocence, ask for grace and not receive it, is the worst of humiliations. I shall hold my head high no matter what happens.

MME. BERNARD. I know well that fierce resignation! It is the pride of innocence. (*She draws MARIE to her and holds her in her embrace*) I think I am the only one on earth who can put a stop to these stories. I must give you back the honor you have never really lost—as if you had! Leopold *will* marry you!

MARIE. Marry me? But, Madame, I don't love him.

MME. BERNARD. You are at least on very friendly terms with him. Now, I don't propose a marriage of love, but a marriage of reason, or rather, a marriage of rehabilitation.

MARIE. Yes, I see: that would bring honor, a great deal more perhaps—maybe everything! But will Leopold consent? He owes me nothing and—I am poor.

MME. BERNARD. Not so poor as you imagine. To begin with, you have forty thousand francs.

MARIE. I must have three hundred thousand more.

MME. BERNARD. Wait a moment: you are going to receive an inheritance.

MARIE. I? From whom?

MME. BERNARD. (*Confused*) Or—a—donation—I don't exactly know. My son has just received word—he's gone to tell M. Léopold.

MARIE. (*With a sad smile*) A donation! Here are a mother and son who love me as if I were

82 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

their own daughter. You have hearts of gold! You are so tender, so generous to me! May God give you all the happiness He has refused me!

(*Enter BERNARD.*)

MME. BERNARD. Back so soon? You haven't found him?

BERNARD. No, he went away this morning, but I left a message for him, asking him to come here as soon as he returns. He was expected back any moment, I was told.

MARIE. I know, M. Bernard, all you want to do for me. I am very grateful. You think I am guilty, but if your plan succeeds you will see that I am not unworthy of your fatherly interest.

BERNARD. Fatherly, yes. But you may be sure my plan will succeed. I promise.

MARIE. Heaven grant it!

BERNARD. (*Aside*) I'll pay!

MME. BERNARD. Someone's coming up-stairs.

MARIE. It's Léopold.

BERNARD. (*Aside*) She recognizes his step!— Well, if you will both leave me——?

MME. BERNARD. Come, Marié. (*They go out, left. The door at the back opens*)

A SERVANT. (*Announcing*) M. Leopold Fourchambault.

(*Enter LEOPOLD.*)

LEOPOLD. I returned just a moment after you left. I came at once, Monsieur.

BERNARD. Thank you. You are doubtless aware of what occurred last night at the prefecture?

LEOPOLD. It was on that account that I went out so early this morning. A friend of mine told me everything last night. I got up at sunrise, and

everything is now arranged. The gossips are now on our side.

BERNARD. Everything arranged?

LEOPOLD. Oh, when something must be done, I waste no time. By six I was at Victor Chauvet's. There's a man for you! He wants to shoulder the responsibility for the whole affair, simply because he believes he ought to marry my sister. I told him three women were compromised, of whom two were no concern of his, but he made no objection. There's a brother-in-law after my own heart! If I owe all this to you, I want to thank you.

BERNARD. Well, then?

LEOPOLD. By seven, Victor saw young Rastiboulois; by eight, the principals and seconds met; by ten we were on the field. I must give the little Baron credit for being equal to the occasion—would have made a very passable brother-in-law on that score! By five minutes past ten, the Baron received a sword-thrust which will keep him in bed for a good two weeks. By eleven, I was lunching with the seconds—friend Victor has a capital appetite! I'm going to invite myself often to dinner. By noon, we were back in Le Havre—complaints from friends—I return home, find your note, and—here I am. Have I wasted my morning?

BERNARD. And do you think everything is arranged now?

LEOPOLD. (*Sitting on the sofa*) Wait till you see which way public opinion will go! Nothing like a sword-thrust at the proper time! The Rastiboulois' won't be able to live in the town! I'll wager that in a week, the Prefect will ask to be transferred. It's very amusing.

BERNARD. (*Sitting on a chair near the sofa*) And what is to become of Mlle. Marie Letellier?

LEOPOLD. Isn't she going to England?

BERNARD. No, Monsieur. The scandal in which

she was involved has prevented her making a living. Sir John Sunter will not take her.

LEOPOLD. The poor girl! This is too bad! What can be done?

BERNARD. Think.

LEOPOLD. Could she be made to accept—very delicately——?

BERNARD. Money? She has lost her good name; that must be restored to her.

LEOPOLD. But, my dear Monsieur, I cannot restore what I have never taken.

BERNARD. I am not asking for confidences, Monsieur.

LEOPOLD. It would be less indiscreet than to ask for what you have just asked. I take it you want me to marry her.

BERNARD. I do.

LEOPOLD. (*Rising*) Does your partnership include the treatment of such questions?

BERNARD. No, Monsieur, but I have a deep interest in Mlle. Letellier.

LEOPOLD. I am well aware of that—you can refuse her nothing.

BERNARD. I consider myself in a way her father.

LEOPOLD. Then you're a judge?

BERNARD. I don't understand.

LEOPOLD. Never mind.

BERNARD. (*Rising*) Whether or not she is your mistress is no affair of mine. I do know however that her good name is lost, and that you are to blame; she is no longer able to make a living. She was your guest, under the protection of your family; you owe her reparation. Marriage is the only possible reparation you can make. That is what I know.

LEOPOLD. If you had done a little less navigating, Monsieur, you would know that there some-

times arise certain situations for which no one is responsible; these situations are false in and by themselves. Teachers, companions, governesses, (*A gesture from BERNARD*) it's all the same: they're all unfortunate girls, objects of suspicion merely because there happens to be a young man in the house.

BERNARD. (*Bitterly*) Yes, I know: work, which is man's glory, reflects shame on a woman. The world is ever on its guard against a woman who tries to make an honest living. Her path is difficult, and all of society is waiting to see her make a false step——

LEOPOLD. Well, she is certainly on a dangerous path!

BERNARD. (*Angrily*) For those who descend, not for those who ascend! *She* ascends! You should respect, help and encourage her. But, no! You despise her, and wait for her to fall! Help her to, even! When she falls, no one turns to give her a helping hand. That's your justice!

LEOPOLD. It may not be just, but it is a fact. *I* haven't compromised Maïa: it's her situation.

BERNARD. (*Restraining himself*) Do you deny having made advances to her?

LEOPOLD. Of course you are not asking for confidences?

BERNARD. Well, do you love her—yes or no?

LEOPOLD. I love her—in a way.

BERNARD. Enough to marry her? Or will you wait until you find someone else, whom perhaps you won't love so well, but who will bring you two or three thousand francs' dowry!

LEOPOLD. (*Bowing*) I prefer three.

BERNARD. Well, Mlle. Letellier has them.

LEOPOLD. Where did they come from? If I'm not indiscreet?

86 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

BERNARD. I have told you that I consider myself in a way as her father.

LEOPOLD. (*Ironically*) Rather young father! My compliments, Monsieur! Royal, quite in keeping with the ancient monarchy! But we simple bourgeois have certain scruples and cannot accept such dowries.

BERNARD. (*Outraged*) You think so? No, you don't believe a word of it.

LEOPOLD. In what capacity would you furnish Mlle. Letellier with a dowry?

BERNARD. Ha! Ha You stick at that—your honor is involved? I recognize your blood! You *are* the grandson of your grandfather!

LEOPOLD. I flatter myself!

BERNARD. Don't mention it, Monsieur.

LEOPOLD. You mean——?

BERNARD. That your grandfather was a blackguardly slanderer.

LEOPOLD. Repeat that!

BERNARD. The lowest of blackguards!—(LEOPOLD *throws his glove in BERNARD's face*; BERNARD *utters a cry, is about to throw himself on LEOPOLD, when he stops*) It is lucky for you that you are my brother!

LEOPOLD. Your brother! Are you—can—? You are the son of the piano-teacher? Well, that needn't prevent our fighting. I know the story, and I am able to prove that you haven't a drop of our blood in your veins.

BERNARD. There, that is your grandfather's crime! You're perpetuating it! During the past three days, I have been able to give the lie to the miserable slanders circulated by your grandfather: according to my mother's wishes, I have saved your father from bankruptcy—your father and my father!

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 87

LEOPOLD. (*In astonishment*) According to your mother's wishes——?

BERNARD. Yes, Monsieur, she still has some respect for the honor of the family which took so little care of hers. I assumed complete charge of you all when you were in trouble; I have now restored your house to order: material and moral; I have saved your sister, who is my sister, from a fearful marriage—all according to the wishes of my mother. And now you have just struck me in the face and I have not struck back, so sure am I that we are both of the same flesh and blood. Now what do you say?

LEOPOLD. That your mother is the noblest of women, that it is true the same blood flows in our veins—that in striking you I struck myself.—Forgive me, brother!

BERNARD. (*Pointing to his cheek*) Efface it. (*LEOPOLD throws himself into BERNARD'S arms*) Now are you willing to let me give Marie her dowry?

LEOPOLD. Yes, brother. Oh, how small I seem beside you! But you will make me worthy of you; you will educate, encourage me. There's some good in me, you'll see——

BERNARD. I am sure of it. Let us treat one another as brothers in private, but before the world we must appear only as friends. Don't say a word of what you have just found out, you understand? Even to your father!

LEOPOLD. Shall he never know, then?

BERNARD. Never. You will realize how important silence is when you know that I have renounced marriage, the possibility of having a family, everything I love, to keep my secret—my mother's secret, rather.

LEOPOLD. (*Grasping his hand*) I understand. Rely on me.

88 THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

SERVANT. (*Announcing*) Mlle. Blanche Fourchambault.

LEOPOLD. (*Aside to BERNARD*) My sister! Our sister!

BERNARD. (*Aside to LEOPOLD*) Sh! (*To the SERVANT*) Ask my mother and Mlle. Letellier to come in. *The SERVANT goes out, left*)

(*Enter BLANCHE, at the back, as BERNARD is speaking.*)

LEOPOLD. (*With an air of severity*) You hardly expected to see me here, did you, Made-moiselle?

BLANCHE. On the contrary: I have come to see you. I want to say something while M. Bernard is present; he will certainly support me.

LEOPOLD. Go on.

BLANCHE. Well, I think that as you have compromised Maïa it is your duty to marry her.

LEOPOLD. Do you believe that?

BLANCHE. So does Papa.

LEOPOLD. And Mamma?

BLANCHE. Not yet, but we'll bring her around, if M. Bernard will help us.

LEOPOLD. He has helped us so well that there is no longer any objection.

BLANCHE. M. Bernard, you are our Providence.

LEOPOLD. Then kiss him.

BLANCHE. (*Embracing BERNARD impetuously*) With all my heart!

BERNARD. (*Aside to LEOPOLD, grasping his hand*) Thank you!

(*Enter MARIE and MME. BERNARD.*)

BLANCHE. How glad I am, Maïa—sister!

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT 89

MARIE. You have succeeded, then, M. Bernard?

BERNARD. I have the honor to ask for your hand on behalf of my friend Leopold.

MARIE. Heaven be praised! I was afraid you might fail! Well, I refuse.

LEOPOLD. What?

BLANCHE. Oh!

MARIE. I refuse.

MME. BERNARD. What?

MARIE. I refuse.

BERNARD. But you just accepted it with gratitude!

MARIE. Yes, because it was the only possible justification for me. If I don't love Monsieur enough to marry him, who will believe I once loved him enough to become his mistress?

MME. BERNARD. No one, eh, Bernard?

BERNARD. No one!

MARIE. And now, good-bye. Defend me, after I am gone. Good-bye, Madame, I shall never forget your goodness; you have been a mother to me. Good-bye, Leopold: don't look that way, now! I have more affection for you than you had for me. Let's be good friends in separating. Good-bye, dear little Blanche. You have called me sister; I shan't forget that. Good-bye, M. Bernard.

BERNARD. Good-bye, Mademoiselle.

BLANCHE. (*Sobbing*) I don't want you to leave. Why, don't you marry my brother? You like him!

LEOPOLD. Because she loves someone else!

MARIE. Leopold!

BLANCHE. Whom?

LEOPOLD. A blind man, who chooses not to see, a deaf man who will not hear, a timid man who thinks he is not young nor handsome enough to be

loved, an idiot who tries to force her into the arms of another, who offers to give her a dowry——

MARIE. Leopold!—It's not true, M. Bernard!

BERNARD. (*Falling into a chair, his face in his hands*) I know it only too well, Mademoiselle!

MME. BERNARD. (*Pointing to him, and speaking to MARIE*) Marie!

MARIE. (*To BERNARD*) What if—if it were true? What if—as I am about to leave? All my friendship, affection, gratitude—can it be that they were really—another feeling, a different sentiment? Here—my hand——!

BERNARD. (*Confusedly*) Mademoiselle—Marie (*Aside to his mother*) No, it can't be!

MME. BERNARD. (*To her son*) She has suffered enough to understand.

BERNARD. (*Aside to his mother*) That's true!

MME. BERNARD. Try!

BERNARD. (*Taking MARIE's hands in his own*) Marie!

BLANCHE. (*To LEOPOLD*) Then she won't be our sister-in-law?

LEOPOLD. There's not much changed! Hasn't Bernard been more than a brother to us?

BLANCHE. That's so.

LEOPOLD. (*Kissing MME. BERNARD's hand*) Madame, I love you too!

Curtain

This book may be kept

FOURTEEN DAYS

A fine will be charged for each day this book is kept overtime.

[illegible]

842.83g.
au 42 F
Ho.

842.83G2E
Au 42 F
Ho.

ac.no.24622

Thanks
For having used me.
Glad
You've not abused me.
Pleased
To be home on time.
Booked
To go out any time.

COLUMBIA COLLEGE LIBRARY
DUBUQUE, IOWA





P9-CDN-937

